DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 615 EA 017 176

AUTHOR	Grayson, Judith M.; And Others
TITLE	Identifying Effective Practices and Programs: A Guide Book.
SPONS AGENCY	California State Dept. of Education. Sacramento. Office of Special Education.
PUB DATE	Dec 83
GRANT	19-03651-Y615-00-82
NOTE	94p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Action Research; Data Collection; Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Criteria; Flow Charts; Information Utilization; Needs Assessment; *Program Evaluation; *Research Design; *Research Methodology; *Special Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Effective Practice Identification

ABSTRACT

Methods of identifying effective special education practices are analyzed to help practitioners identify and adopt such practices. The contents of this guide include a flowchart for effective practice identification (EPI), an analysis of decision-making steps in this process, and two examples of identification procedures. The decision-making steps outlined are (1) setting goals, (2) delineating relevant issues, (3) nominating programs to be studied, (4) selecting programs from those nominated, (5) developing criteria for evaluating practices, (6) specifying the information needed, (7) developing procedures to document programs, (8) planning a strategy for disseminating findings, and (9) designing a replication support system to help new sites adopt effective practices and programs. The material outlining each step presents definitions of relevant terms, methods and procedures for executing the step, the step's relationship to other steps, questions to guide decision-making, and normative results. The examples provided describe, first, how the California State Department of Education's Office of Special Education used EPI to obtain information for school districts statewide, and, second, how a school district might use EPI to evaluate a practice for potential adoption. An appendix examines EPI methodologies as practiced. (MCG)

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IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS

A Guidebook

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December 1983

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This project was supported by a Special Study grant (19-03651-Y615-0G-82) from the Office of Special Education, California State Department of Education. Findings, conclusions, and other opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and they do not reflect the official position of the California State Department of Education nor of the sponsoring agency and no endorsement is implied.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

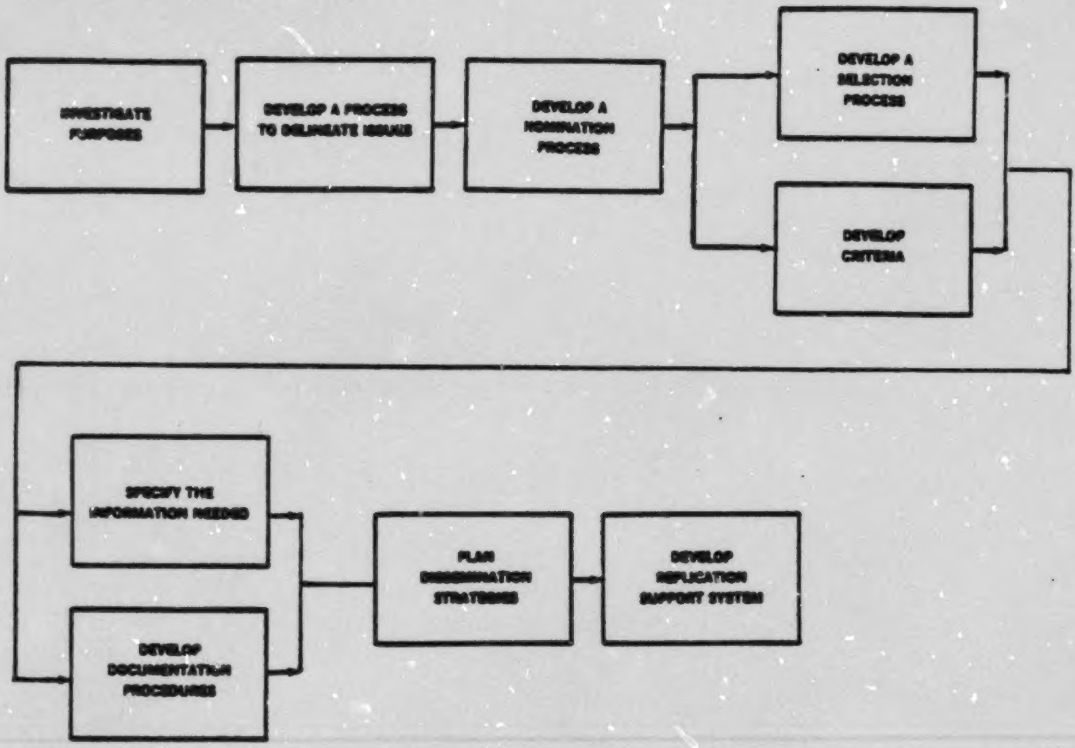
The purpose of the study was twofold: (1) to examine and analyze the various methodologies used in identifying and documenting effective practices/programs; and (2) to develop a guidebook for special education practitioners who are involved in either the identification of effective practices or the selection of effective practices for replication.

The first phase of the study involved an information search, data collection, and data analysis. Documents describing state and federal effective practice identification (EPI) projects were located through a variety of sources, including a computer search of the literature. Of the 427 titles identified, 25 represented unduplicated EPI projects. These EPI projects varied across types of effective educational programs/practices (e.g., special education, vocational education) as well as across educational levels (e.g., elementary, secondary). The geographic area from which the programs/practices were drawn also varied. Some engaged in a national search for effective programs/practices, whereas others confined their efforts to individual states or regions.

Each EPI project reviewed was coded according to the methods it used to identify, document, and replicate effective programs/practices. The major categories used in coding each document were: purpose, issue delineation, nomination process, selection process, selection criteria, information sought, documentation procedures, dissemination strategies, and replication support. Interrater reliability between document reviewers was determined and considered adequate. Data analysis involved determining the frequency with which the various coding categories were employed by the projects reviewed and analyzing the relationships between categories.

Six distinct purposes for conducting EPI projects were identified: adoption/service improvement, development, dissemination, replication, research, and training. Of these, dissemination was most frequently identified. Only 76% of the EPI projects reviewed included any form of process by which those engaging in an EPI project begin outlining the problems/areas of concern, or needs related to the practices/programs they are seeking (issue delineation). All projects had some form of nomination process with the majority using interviews or surveys. 88% of the projects reviewed used selection-by-evaluation to determine which nominated sites warranted inclusion as effective programs/practices, while 16% used self-selection. Selection criteria refer to the various evaluative areas used to determine whether or not a practice/program could be considered effective. The median number of criteria used by the projects reviewed was six. The selection process was, surprisingly, unrelated to the number of criteria. In order to document the selected programs/practices, a majority of the projects collected information primarily by conducting site visits. The information most frequently sought included descriptive information about the program, materials used, resources required, the client group served, and the name of a contact person. Ninety-two percent of the projects had some form of dissemination strategy, most often a document describing the practices/programs. Only 24% of the projects provided some form of replication support as well.

Phase two of the project incorporated the study results in a how-to-guide for practitioners. The categories identified during the coding process formed the basis for a flowchart of the steps for conducting an EPI project. The major steps of the EPI process have been depicted below.


INVESTIGATE PURPOSES
DEVELOP A PROCESS TO DELINEATE ISSUES
DEVELOP A NOMINATION PROCESS
DEVELOP A SELECTION PROCESS
DEVELOP CRITERIA
SPECIFY THE INFORMATION NEEDED
DEVELOP DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES
PLAN DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES
DEVELOP REPLICATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

These steps, along with the relevant information or processes needed to conduct the steps (which appear on the full-version of the flowchart), are also elaborated in the guide in a narrative description. This narrative description includes in some detail the major issues and considerations in conducting each step of the process. In addition, two extended examples of EPI projects concretely illustrate the process that has been described. A draft of the guide was reviewed by five educators, three with multiple EPI project experience and two with limited knowledge of EPI projects. Suggested modifications have been incorporated in the guide.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE OF GUIDE

This guide is intended to provide assistance to those--school administrators, department of education staff, or recipients of federal or state grants or contracts--who are engaged in the identification of effective educational programs/practices. The identification of effective programs/practices has become widespread in education over the past decade. Much of the impetus to identify effective programs/practices has come from federal and state mandates. However, the focus on effective program/practice identification (EPI) has spread beyond what is mandated by federal or state legislation. Many educational agencies at all levels have engaged in the identification of effective programs/practices to meet their own specialized needs.

Despite the current emphasis on identifying effective programs/practices, there is very little literature available to aid those who engage in the process for the first time or for those who might be interested in improving their previous efforts.

EPI is a multi-staged process with many complexities. This guide is intended to describe the steps of the EPI process and alert the reader to the particular decisions that are required at each step so that those engaging in the identification of effective programs/practices can attain their goals.

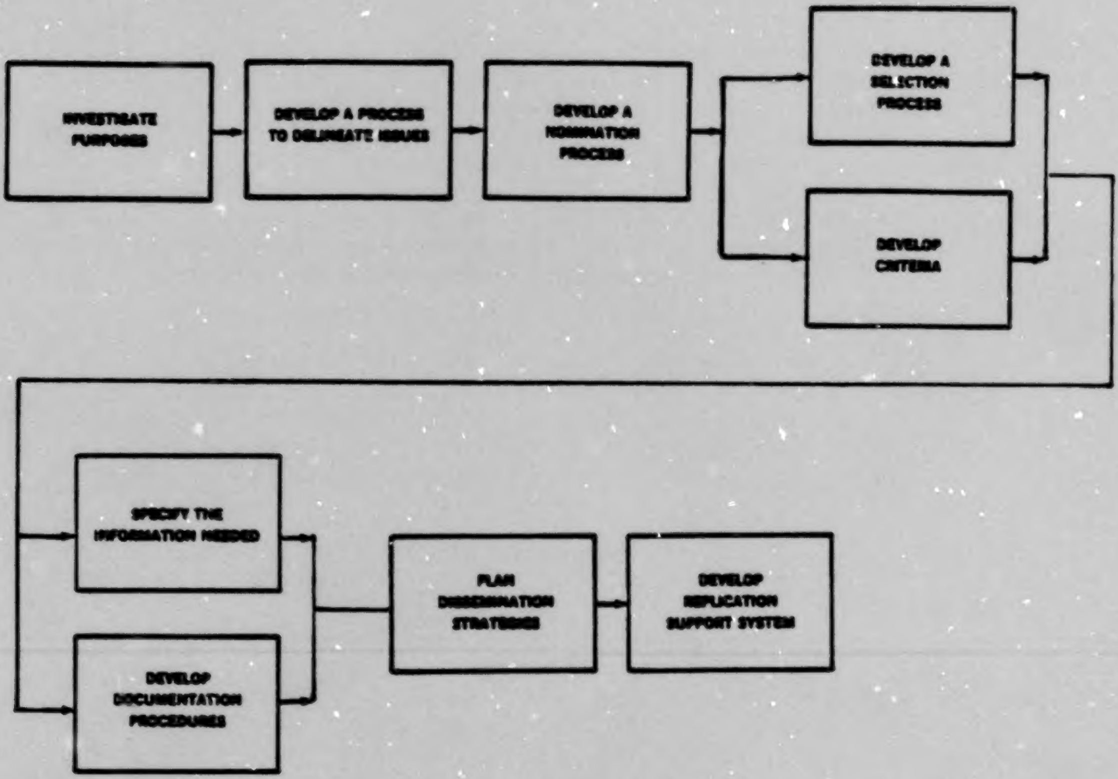
B. DEVELOPMENT OF GUIDE

The EPI guide is based upon a research study supported by the California Department of Education, Office of Special Education. The study involved reviewing documents describing federal and state EPI projects. The EPI projects reviewed varied across types of effective educational programs/practices that were identified (e.g., special education, vocational education) as well as across educational level (e.g., elementary, secondary). The geographic area from which the practices were drawn also varied. Some used the nation from which to draw their pool of effective programs/practices; others confined their efforts to individual regions or states.

The elements of each document reviewed were coded according to the following categories: purpose, methodological procedures, dissemination strategies, replication system, and demographic information. The data obtained from the documents were analyzed to determine whether those engaging in EPI used variants of the same process or whether there were distinct, clearly identifiable ways of conducting an EPI. A further consideration was the relationship between the purposes of an EPI study, demographic information about the programs/practices, and the methodological procedures used to identify programs/practices.

The EPI process described in the guide represents a compilation of the information obtained in the study.

C. USING THE GUIDE


INVESTIGATE PURPOSES
DEVELOP A PROCESS TO DELINEATE ISSUES
DEVELOP A NOMINATION PROCESS
DEVELOP A SELECTION PROCESS
DEVELOP CRITERIA
SPECIFY THE INFORMATION NEEDED
DEVELOP DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES
PLAN DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES
DEVELOP REPLICATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

The above chart represents the major steps of the EPI process described in this guide. The process described is a type of field-based research. The intent of this research is to identify effective programs/practices. Like other types of research, one must do a considerable amount of planning and preparation prior to ever stepping into the field (i.e., of schools, classrooms, etc.). However, peculiar to this type of research is that there are likely to be changes in the original conception as the process progresses. EPI is the type of process that requires some initial structure but enough flexibility by those who conduct it to make needed changes as they become necessary.

Although the EPI process depicted above shows a linear progression from one step to the next, the more typical way of engaging in the process is iterative in nature. Some of the earlier steps will be returned to as the process progresses, usually with more knowledge and understanding about the types of programs/practices sought. Furthermore, some of the later steps might require significant planning early on, even though the plans cannot be fully implemented until later in the process.

Terminology

Certain terminology that has been used throughout the guide warrants some explanation. For the most part, the authors have chosen to use the term effective, rather than model, exemplary, or promising when describing the types of programs/practices that are to be identified. The literature on educational innovation, dissemination, and change uses all of the terms, sometimes interchangeably. Although there are slight differences in meaning between the terms, for the purposes of this guide, the term effective can be thought to encompass the other terms as well.

In addition, the construction programs/practices is used in the guide. This construction has been selected to acknowledge the fact that some EPI studies are interested in identifying effective programs, others effective practices, and some both. A program connotes a multifaceted instructional plan with integrated sections or units. The notion of a practice suggests an educational strategy of more limited scope, a plan or method to attain a very specific educational goal.

D. CONTENTS OF GUIDE

Flowchart

The EPI process has been graphically depicted in a flowchart. It would be helpful to readers to follow along on the flowchart when reading this section. The flowchart is located on pages 9-12. The flowchart includes enroute questions to guide the EPI process. A question occurs at each step in the process. A "Yes" answer moves the reader on to the next step; a "No" answer moves the reader to the elements involved in accomplishing the particular step. For example, step one in the process asks the reader "Do You Have A Clearly Defined Purpose?" If the reader answers "Yes" to this question the flowchart directs the reader to produce a "Statement of Purpose," and then moves the reader to the next question. If the answer to the first question is "No," however, the flowchart directs the reader to "Investigate Purposes." The flowchart then moves the reader to the possible purposes for engaging in EPI (i.e., Adoption/Service Improvement, Development, etc.). After investigating possible purposes and ending up with a "Statement of Purpose," the flowchart sends the reader to the next question, or step, in the process. The second question is "Have You Identified The Issue Surrounding Your Topic?" If the answer to this question is "Yes," the flowchart directs the reader to provide an "Outline Of Issues." If the answer is "No," the reader then is directed to "Develop A Process To Delineate Issues" and provided with possible processes for delineating issues (i.e., Conference, Interviews, etc.). After considering the various processes to delineate issues, it is assumed that the reader will engage in one or more of them in order to end up with an "Outline Of Issues." With an outline of issues in hand, the flowchart directs the reader to the next question, "Do The Issues Require That You Modify Your Purpose?" If the answer to this question is "No," the reader then moves to the next question, or step. in the EPI process. If the answer to the question is "Yes," the reader then is directed back to step one to investigate purposes again so that the purpose for conducting the EPI study will be consistent with the issues involved. The flowchart then continues in the same manner through each stage of the EPI process.

It should be pointed out, so as to avoid possible confusion for some readers, that the elements listed on the flowchart as ways to resolve the major question at each step are of two types. In step one, for example, the reader is directed to "Investigate Purposes," and the elements listed are actual purposes (i.e., Adoption/Service Improvement, etc.). In step two, however, the reader is directed to "Develop A Process To Delineate Issues." The elements provided for this stage are processes to delineate issues and not the issues themselves. It would be impossible to delineate the issues since these will vary depending on the focus of one's EPI study. The elements on the flowchart will be one of these two types at each step in the process.

Decision Steps in the Identification Process

In addition to the flowchart, the steps of the EPI process are also described in narrative form. Each step of the process constitutes its own section in the guide. Each of these sections of the guide is organized in the same manner. Step one, for example, Investigate Purposes contains the relevant portion of the flowchart for this stage along with several narrative subsections. There is a Description of Terms subsection in which all the terms relevant to the step are described. These are the terms that appear on the flowchart. Next is an Overview subsection. The Overview delineates and discusses some of the major issues or problems related to conducting this step in the EPI process. Next follows the Relationship to Other Steps subsection, which describes how the step under discussion relates to the other steps in the process. The next subsection contains a list of specific questions tailored to that step. In the case of step one, this subsection is called Questions to Guide Purpose. The EPI study team should use these questions to determine whether the step has been adequately conducted. These questions may be used to help focus the activities engaged in at each step in the process. Lastly, an Outcome subsection concludes each section, or step. The Outcome delineates the components of the final product the EPI study team should end up with at the conclusion of each step.

Examples

Following the narrative description of the EPI process there is a section entitled Examples in which two examples are given of different educational agencies engaging in EPI projects. The first example is from the perspective of a state education agency (SEA) in which the purpose of the EPI project is information dissemination. The perspective of a local education agency (LEA) is taken in the second example with adoption/service improvement as the purpose. With each of these examples, or sample models, the reader is taken through each of the steps of the EPI process as delineated in the guide. The decisions that must be made by each agency are described in order to achieve their respective purposes. The first example described is taken from a project reviewed for the research study upon which this guide is based. The second example is hypothetical. A hypothetical example is used because no written EPI projects were uncovered from the LEA perspective. This was not considered unusual since local districts looking for effective programs/practices to adopt are unlikely to write up their process for doing this. Nevertheless, the authors of the guide consider the LEA perspective an important one for EPI.

Summary of Study

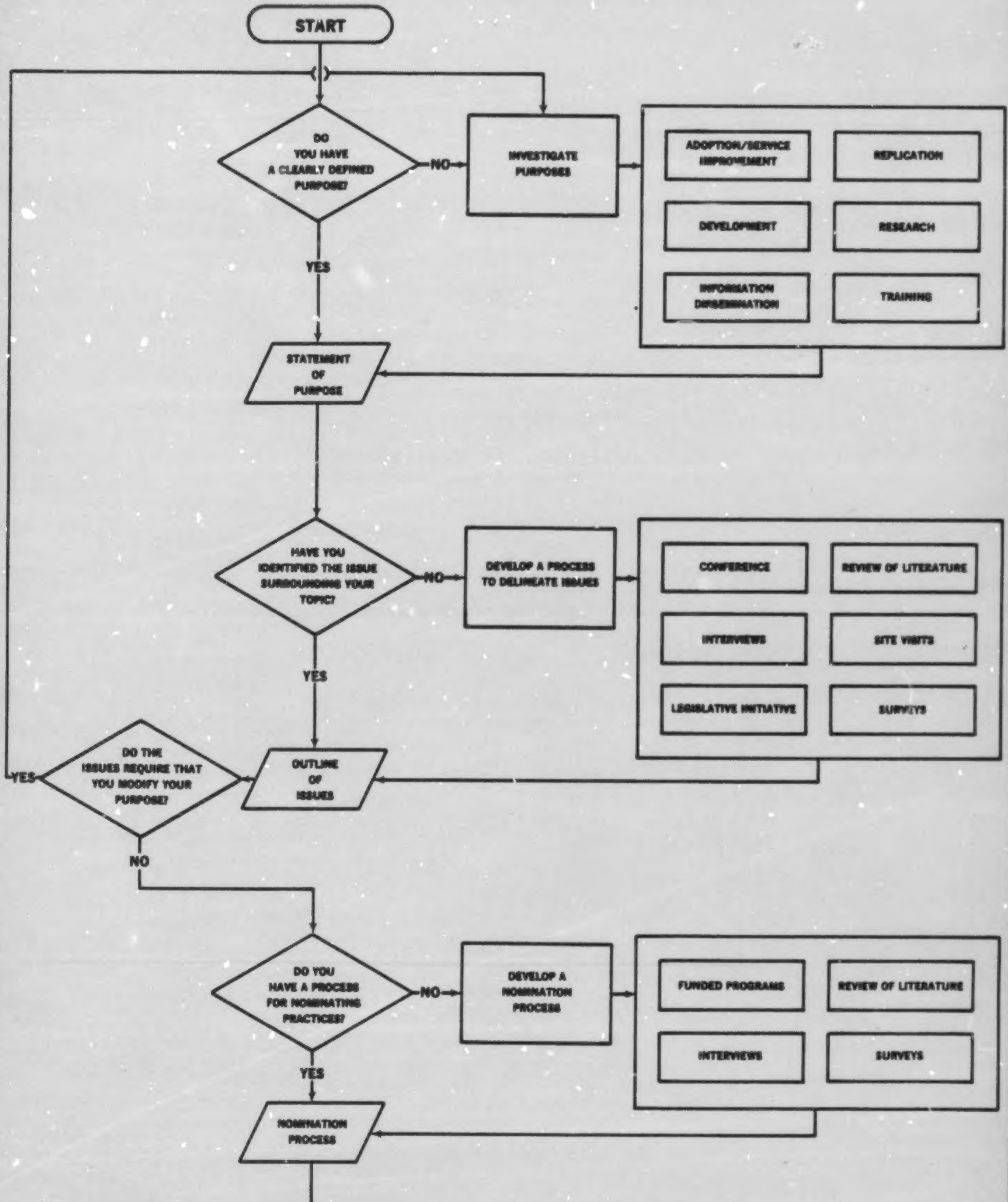
Appended to the guide is a summary of the research study on which the guide is based. The summary includes the following sections: Introduction; Methods of the Study; Findings; and Conclusions.

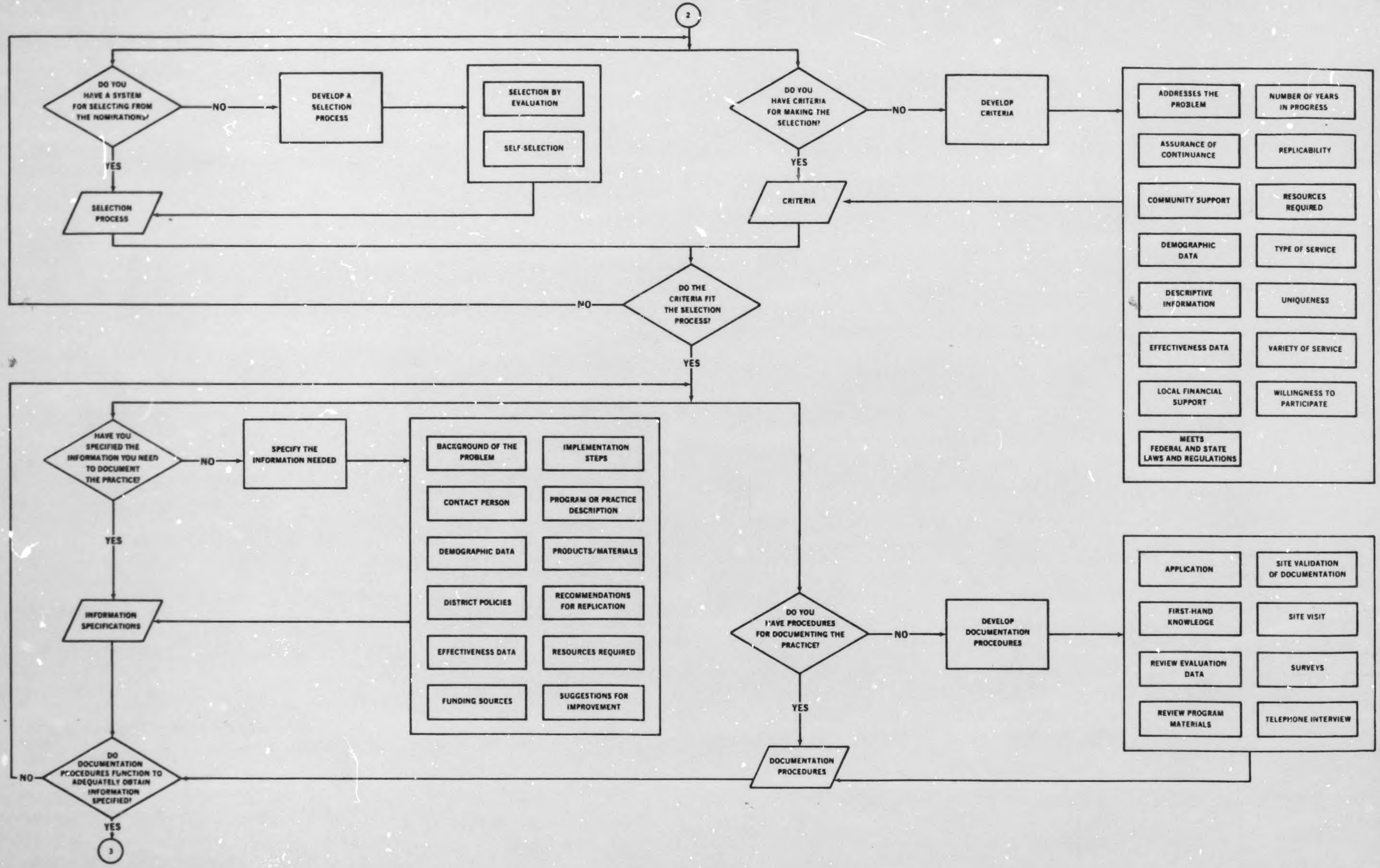
Bibliography

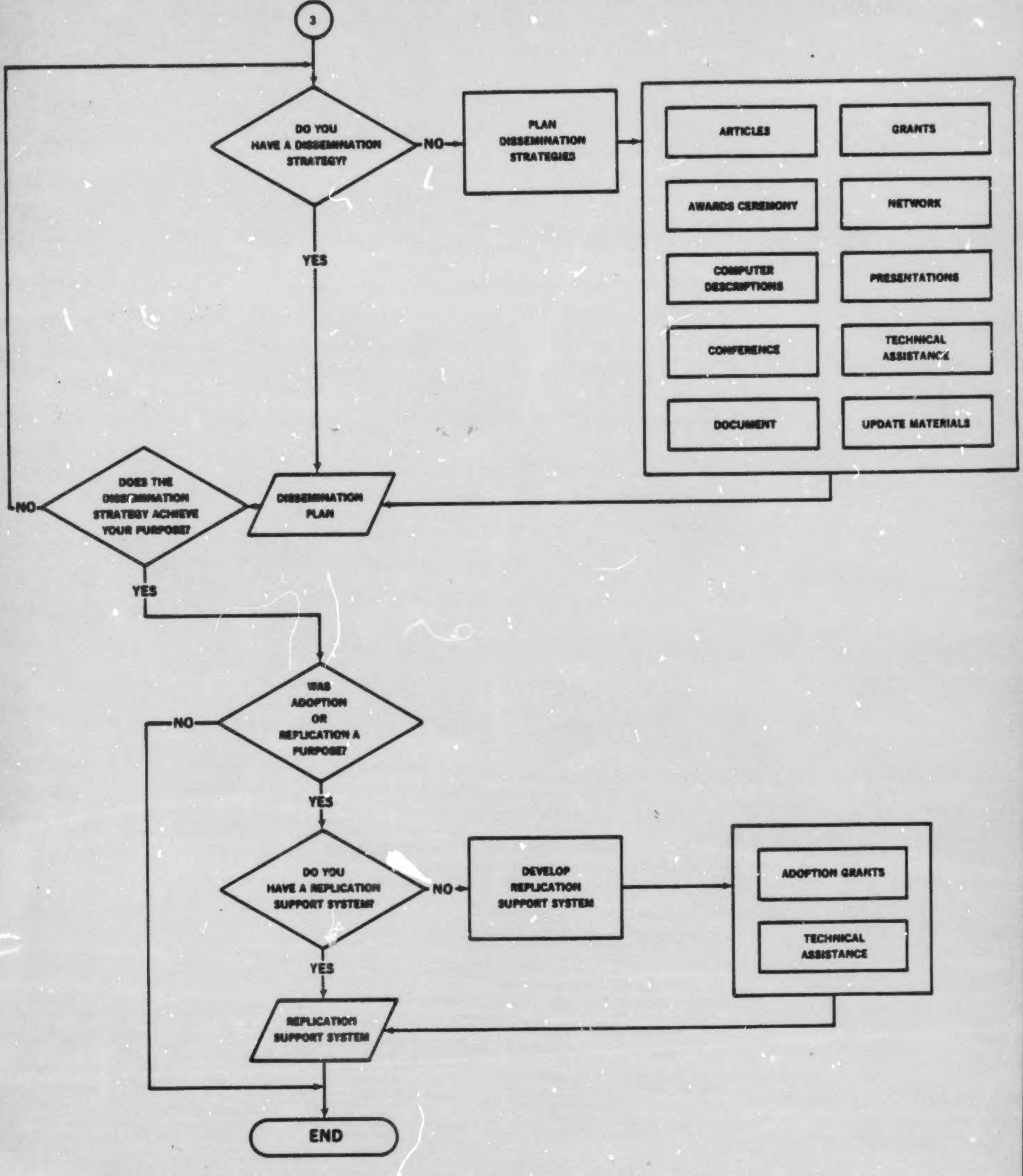
The bibliography is divided into two sections. The first lists all EPI project documents that were reviewed and coded as part of the research study. The second section includes related literature that was reviewed in the course of the study.

II. A FLOWCHART FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IDENTIFICATION

The flowchart which appears in its entirety on the following pages depicts all the steps of the EPI process. The flowchart format makes apparent the interconnections between each of the steps in the process. These are the steps that the authors have identified as integral to identifying, documenting, and replicating effective practices/programs. Each step is introduced with a question. The questions relate to the following topics: purpose investigation, issue delineation, nomination process, selection process, selection criteria, information needed, documentation procedures, dissemination strategies, and replication system. In order to explore the topic posed by the question at each step, there is a listing of process elements for each step. In step one, there are six process elements, that is, possible purposes for which an EPI study might be conducted (e.g., adoption/service improvement). In step two, six process elements are listed. These are ways in which the issues might be delineated that are relevant to the type of programs/practices that are being sought (e.g., by a conference, or by interviews with relevant professionals). Step three lists four process elements: ways in which nominations of relevant effective practices/programs might be generated. There are nine steps of the EPI process in all, each step containing a set of process elements. The process elements listed are either those identified in the study or those with which the authors had some familiarity; they are not necessarily an exhaustive list. Following the flowchart in Chapter three, each step of the EPI process is described in detail with the relevant sections of the flowchart reproduced for each step.

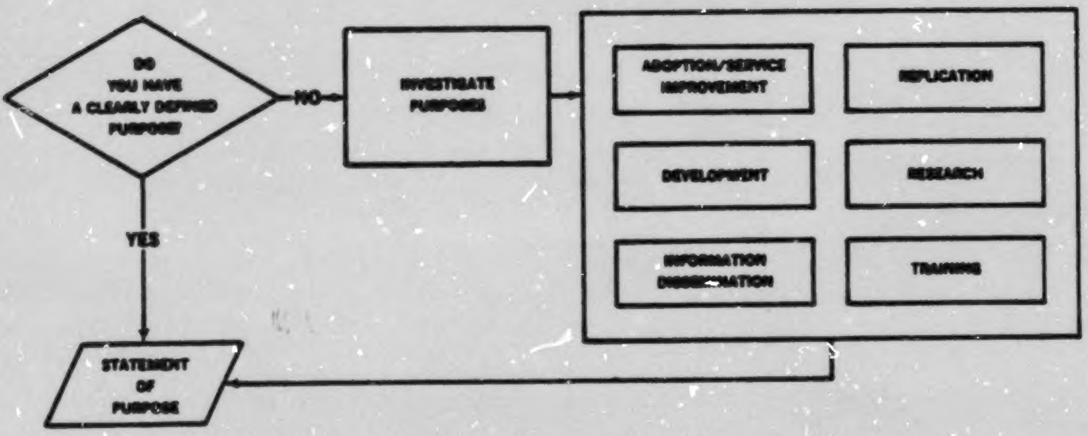

START
DO YOU HAVE A CLEARLY DEFINED PURPOSE?
NO
INVESTIGATE PURPOSES
ADOPTION/SERVICE IMPROVEMENT
REPLICATION
DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH
INFORMATION DISSEMINATION
TRAINING
YES
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED THE ISSUE SURROUNDING YOUR TOPIC?
NO
DEVELOP A PROCESS TO DELINEATE ISSUES
CONFERENCE
REVIEW OF LITERATURE
INTERVIEWS
SITE VISITS
LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE
SURVEYS
YES
DO THE ISSUES REQUIRE THAT YOU MODIFY YOUR PURPOSE?
YES
OUTLINE OF ISSUES
NO
DO YOU HAVE A PROCESS FOR NOMINATING PRACTICES?
NO
DEVELOP A NOMINATION PROCESS
FUNDED PROGRAMS
REVIEW OF LITERATURE
INTERVIEWS
SURVEYS
YES
NOMINATION PROCESS
2


2
DO YOU HAVE A SYSTEM FOR SELECTING FROM THE NOMINATIONS?
NO
DEVELOP A SELECTION PROCESS
SELECTION BY EVALUATION
SELF-SELECTION
YES
SELECTION PROCESS
DO YOU HAVE CRITERIA FOR MAKING THE SELECTION?
NO
DEVELOP CRITERIA
ADDRESSES THE PROBLEM
NUMBER OF YEARS IN PROGRESS
ASSURANCE OF CONTINUANCE
REPLICABILITY
COMMUNITY SUPPORT
RESOURCES REQUIRED
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
TYPE OF SERVICE
DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION
UNIQUENESS
EFFECTIVENESS DATA
VARIETY OF SERVICE
LOCAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT
WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE
MEETS FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS AND REGULATIONS
YES
CRITERIA
DO THE CRITERIA FIT THE SELECTION PROCESS?
NO
YES
HAVE YOU SPECIFIED THE INFORMATION YOU NEED TO DOCUMENT THE PRACTICE?
NO
SPECIFY THE INFORMATION NEEDED
BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS
CONTACT PERSON
PROGRAM OR PRACTICE DESCRIPTION
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
PRODUCTS/MATERIALS
DISTRICT POLICIES
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATION
EFFECTIVENESS DATA
RESOURCES REQUIRED
FUNDING SOURCES
SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
YES
INFORMATION SPECIFICATIONS
DO YOU HAVE PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENTING THE PRACTICE?
NO
DEVELOP DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES
APPLICATION
SITE VALIDATION OF DOCUMENTATION
FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE
SITE VISIT
REVIEW EVALUATION DATA
SURVEYS
REVIEW PROGRAM MATERIALS
TELEPHONE INTERVIEW
YES
DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES
DO DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES FUNCTION TO ADEQUATELY OBTAIN INFORMATION SPECIFIED?
NO
YES
3


3
DO YOU HAVE A DISSEMINATION STRATEGY?
NO
PLAN DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES
ARTICLES
GRANTS
AWARDS CEREMONY
NETWORK
COMPUTER DESCRIPTIONS
PRESENTATIONS
CONFERENCE
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
DOCUMENT
UPDATE MATERIALS
YES
DOES THE DISSEMINATION STRATEGY ACHIEVE YOUR PURPOSE?
NO
DISSEMINATION PLAN
YES
WAS ADOPTION OR REPLICATION A PURPOSE?
NO
YES
DO YOU HAVE A REPLICATION SUPPORT SYSTEM?
NO
DEVELOP REPLICATION SUPPORT SYSTEM
ADOPTION GRANTS
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
YES
REPLICATION SUPPORT SYSTEM
END

III. DECISION STEPS IN THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

A. INVESTIGATE PURPOSES


DO YOU HAVE A CLEARLY DEFINED PURPOSE?
NO
INVESTIGATE PURPOSES
ADOPTION/SERVICE IMPROVEMENT
REPLICATION
DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH
INFORMATION DISSEMINATION
TRAINING
YES
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

Purpose, as we have used it in this guidebook, means the reasons for identifying effective practices/programs or the goals desired by engaging in the effective practice/program identification process. From our study, we have isolated six distinct purposes for which an agency might conduct an effective practice identification (EPI) project. It is often the case that more than one purpose is represented in an EPI project.

Adoption/Service Improvement. The adoption/service improvement purpose is from the perspective of the administration staff of a particular site desiring to locate practices/programs appropriate to their situation. Local school districts might be engaged in identifying effective practices/programs to solve a specific problem at a given site.

Development. An agency might be interested in identifying effective practices to encourage the growth or refinement of these practices.

Information Dissemination. The purpose we most frequently came across in the study was information dissemination. This refers to identifying effective practices/programs to distribute information about them with the expectation that this information will lead to improvement in current educational practice. Sometimes the information distributed not only describes individual effective practices or programs but also analyzes the similarities between them. Dissemination may be conducted through any or a combination of several means (e.g., print-brochures, compendia, directories, etc., media, or in person).

Replication. The replication purpose is from the perspective of an agency which is seeking widespread expansion of proven ideas. An agency, such as a state department, might embark upon the identification of effective practices/programs so that once they are identified the agency can offer assistance to new sites interested in implementing them. Assistance typically is provided by funding or technical assistance. We have used "replication" to cover the spectrum which stretches from copying a practice/program with complete fidelity to adapting a component of the practice/program to fit a new site. At some stage in their project the EPI group may want to specify a point on that spectrum above which they are willing to provide support resources and below which they are not.

Research. When research is the purpose for identifying effective practices/programs, our study shows that an agency then 1) attempts to determine which specific components of programs produce outcomes, 2) measures program implementation, or 3) surveys and analyzes existing practices or programs. The first approach amounts to impact evaluation. The second is a part of formative evaluation; the evaluators describe the extent to which a specific program has been implemented as planned. The third approach constitutes a descriptive study of those practices/programs surveyed and can result in a report on the state-of-the art.

Training. When training is the purpose, an agency identifies effective practices/programs in order to include them as part of a workshop, or other instructional presentation.

OVERVIEW

The purpose-setting phase is the time to determine and clarify the specific outcomes desired by engaging in the identification of effective practices/programs. A preliminary question to pursue is whether EPI is in fact the proper course of action to achieve the results desired.

EPI is askin to a field-based research study. It may be conducted, however, with greater or lesser methodological rigor depending on one's purpose, resources, and staff expertise.

Although each of the purposes described are distinct, though not mutually exclusive, they all reveal a desire to improve educational service.

Advantageous use of EPI methodology in a local setting requires significant groundwork. All persons involved in the project--from its early steps when the problem is developed to the implementation of the solution--will need to understand and be committed to the effort and be kept informed throughout.

Local districts may have adoption/service improvement as their purpose when embarking on an EPI project. The use of the EPI strategy by a local district, in this case, would be to help that district locate the kind of educational program or practice that would help solve a problem the district faces. The practice/program that a district might seek could relate to administrative or organizational concerns as well as problems faced in the classroom.

With development as a purpose, the EPI project's intent will be to encourage the design or refinement of innovative practices/programs. Impetus for these projects comes from awareness that there is not much activity in the field on the needed topic or that practices/programs in the field have not caught up with advances in theory. Before encouraging new development, the EPI project staff will want to do a rather thorough check for existing practices/programs in order to prevent "re-inventing the wheel." Also important in the early stages of the project will be the determination of what is expected by the funding agency after the development of a good practice/program.

For information dissemination, attention should be given to the audience for whom the information will be prepared. What and how much will they need to know? Which format will be the easiest for them to use? Those adopting this purpose should realize that, when used singly, information dissemination typically has only the capability of sparking change. To create well-developed, lasting improvement dissemination needs to be coupled with replication.

If replication is declared the purpose for effective practice identification, this resolve indicates a commitment to helping potential adopters in the actual implementation of the specific practice/program. Change requires thoughtful preplanning by the agency that is promoting change. The EPI project that is intent upon their identified practices/programs being replicated needs to plan from the beginning to provide a support system for the adopters. The help may be in the form of funds needed for start-up and/or may be the provision of technical assistance. Without some concrete support, the ideas introduced by EPI results will too often remain ideas rather than the first steps for change. Meaningful change requires carefully focused support of the new practice/program especially in the initiation and early implementation stages.

Being field-based, EPI research has the potential advantages of direct application to practice, timeliness, and high credibility with practitioners. Researchers should consider at the beginning of their project the feasibility of coupling their research purpose with one of "information dissemination," "training," or "replication."

Designing training around successful field examples and the generalizations that can be made across examples brings a level of credibility and vitality to a training that is otherwise difficult to reach. The costs of using this approach will undoubtedly be a consideration. A thorough search could require extensive travel. Indepth interviewing/observing can require more than one person for more than one or two days. The fact that state-of-the-art practices are often not in print drives up the personnel costs by necessitating that the training staff document the practices. The training developers will need to weigh costs vs. impact that this type of training can have.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

The purpose guides the entire study. It focuses the decision making in each of the steps which follow. With a clear purpose, many of the steps will fall easily into place. Later steps will often direct you back to this first step to check that you are still on track or to suggest further qualification of your intent. EPI is the kind of process in which refinements and revisions are likely to occur as the project evolves.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE PURPOSE

What motivates you to identify practices?

What are your intended outcomes?

Does EPI seem to be the best strategy to accomplish this outcome?

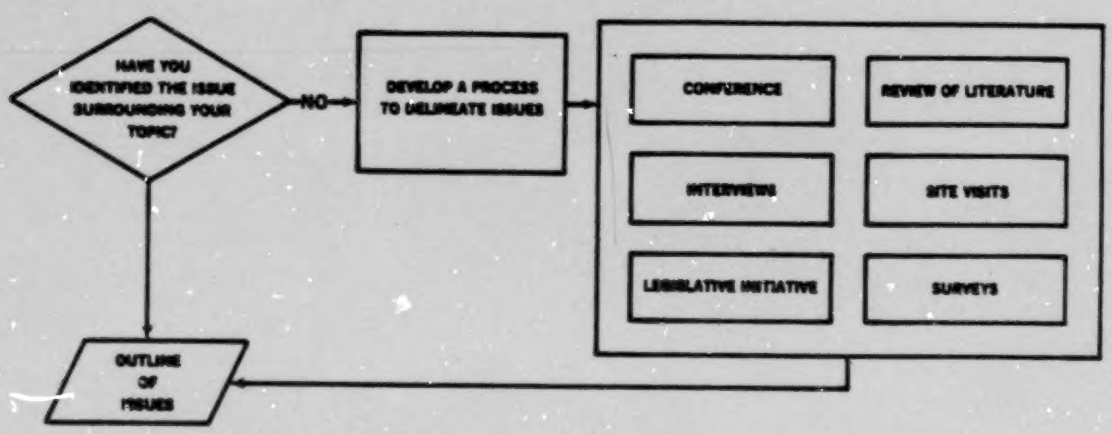
What resources do you have to conduct the EPI project and are these resources adequate to achieve the outcomes?

OUTCOME

A statement of purpose is

- written;
- well-defined and clear;
- commonly understood and shared by the people involved; and
- includes intended outcome(s).

B. DELINEATE ISSUES


HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED THE ISSUE SURROUNDING YOUR TOPIC?
NO
DEVELOP A PROCESS TO DELINEATE ISSUES
CONFERENCE
REVIEW OF LITERATURE
INTERVIEWS
SITE VISITS
LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE
SURVEYS
OUTLINE OF ISSUES

DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

Issue delineation is the process by which those engaging in effective practice identification begin outlining the problems, areas of concern, or needs related to the practices/programs they are seeking. Once the issues are identified, those engaged in the EPI project should have a fairly clear idea about what is typically being done in the field, what some of the pressing problems are, and thus, about what constitutes a truly effective practice of the type they are seeking.

There are a variety of methods by which these needs, issues, and areas of concern may be delineated.

Conferences. One way of determining what some of the issues or problems are related to certain types of educational practices/programs is to convene a meeting or series of meetings at which persons knowledgeable on the topic are invited to help identify and delineate the issues.

Interviews. A second way of identifying issues is to conduct interviews with persons identified as knowledgeable on the topic for the purpose of soliciting information.

Legislative Initiative. Sometimes the mandates in federal or state legislation or the requests for proposals from governmental agencies broadly determine the specific types of practices/programs that should be sought by those receiving governmental funds. In this case, an analysis of the legislation or proposal request is in order, along with a thorough analysis of the problem by the agency receiving funds for the EPI study.

Review of the Literature. A search of relevant documents, such as journal articles, legislation, newsletters, and books constitutes a fourth method for identifying issues.

Site Visits. Sometimes observations and interviews at effective practice sites are done in order to determine what some of the areas of concern are related to particular types of educational practices.

Surveys. The identification of issues based on written responses from knowledgeable persons to a questionnaire constitutes another way to determine needs, areas of concern, and problems.

OVERVIEW

The issue-identification phase is the time to determine precisely the issue, problem, or need. The agency engaged in the EPI project must understand why the practices/programs are being sought, what traditional practice has been in the area, what the problems have been, and who is affected by these problems. Delineation of issues is deceptively difficult and time consuming. However, it is critical to the value of the entire process. Broad issues must be progressively refined and narrowed.

Determining who has the information that can answer the questions listed above is a related consideration. Is the problem such that it can adequately be defined by those closest to it? Or, is it one of broader scope requiring a wide array of perspectives statewide, or even nationally, to assist in defining it precisely?

Whether or not the project outcomes are to be applied to a specific site or are intended to be generalizable to many situations will also influence the breadth and depth of the issue identification phase. Of course, dollar and human resources will also help define the amount of time and energy to expend. Once the problems are identified it may be that a search of practices/programs can not be made to resolve them all. The problems, or areas of concern, may be too numerous. If that is the case, priorities will need to be established to make the EPI search manageable.

Each method of identifying issues has related advantages and disadvantages:

Conferences are advantageous because they offer face-to-face contact which tends to increase the interaction that takes place. When issue identification is the purpose of the conference, this interaction allows ideas to trigger each other. Conferences are also advantageous when the recency of the information is a concern. An additional benefit is the opportunity to set up a nomination network and even identify potential sites.

Considerations relevant to conferences include: who the participants should be, the number of participants, and the conference format. Emphasis on theoretical or practical issues will guide the selection of participants. The number of participants is dependent on cost factors, the length of time the group will be together, the amount of interaction and the number of differing perspectives required to achieve the purpose. The conference format will be developed around similar concerns. Format possibilities include open forums, small discussion groups, and work groups with well-defined tasks.

Who one should interview is a major consideration. The perspective desired (i.e., theoretical or practical) assists in this determination.

The cost of interviewing is always a limiting factor. Interview costs include staff time and, when conducted in-person, travel expenses. Telephone interviews eliminate the travel expense and maximize staff time. They suffer from certain limitations: effective telephone interviews require extensive advance communication and scheduling, usually by mail; referencing documents is difficult; and few people can communicate well by phone for a period of more than 30 minutes or so.

Another consideration is the nature of the interview itself. Unstructured interviews (i.e., those following an outline rather than a list of specific questions) have been found to be useful when issues are not yet well-defined or when the interviewees' values are desired. Structured interviews become more frequent as the information desired becomes better specified. Structured interviews also insure that all desired information is elicited. Many of the studies reviewed use a combination of structured and unstructured interviewing either over time or within a single interview situation. Whichever method is used, establishing rapport is a critical aspect of interviewing. Advanced preparation helps both the interviewer and interviewee know what is expected.

A literature review is an essential first step for all but those most knowledgeable in the field; most other methods of issue identification are used in conjunction with a review of the literature. There are two limitations to this method: (1) available materials are often outdated; and (2) unpublished materials, which are a primary source of descriptive information, are difficult to locate and obtain. Also knowing when enough material has been reviewed can be problematic. A general rule of thumb is that once material becomes redundant, the investigator can assume that major sources have been covered.

When conducted for the purpose of identifying issues, site visits function almost as a preliminary research study. Extensive information on the issues faced by practitioners can be obtained. This method is especially valuable in developing areas for which little or no research and literature exist and for extremely complex topics.

Site visits require consideration of who and what to visit. Decisions must be made regarding the roles of the people to interview, the nature of the interviews, and whether observation of facilities and the actual implementation of practices/programs are required. The number of persons interviewed and the amount of observation conducted are limited by time and cost constraints. Any inconveniences or burdens placed on the site personnel must also be considered. Site visits, however, offer a unique opportunity for project staff to investigate and verify practice/program functioning. Unanticipated information is more likely to come to light during site visits than through any other method. It is important to remember that program staff involved in the day-to-day operation of effective programs may not always be able to articulate all elements which contribute to the practice's/program's success.

Since survey information is solicited in written form, it is essential that the information requested is clearly specified. An additional and primary factor limiting the effectiveness of surveys is response rate. Response rate is often low unless respondents have some investment in the EPI project (e.g., relation to the EPI project, or a strong personal or professional investment in the process or area of concern). The length of the survey can also affect the response rate. Short questionnaires that require simple, checklist-like responses increase response rate. Unfortunately, such surveys obtain minimal information and, because of their structured format, fail to gain information not specifically requested.

Surveys are a cost-effective method of soliciting information from a broad group. For instance, it may be desirable to contact all groups that may potentially be represented in an EPI project. If an invested group exists, surveys are an efficient and cost-effective method. The information needed, wording of items, ways to increase the response rate, and summarization of information must be considered. Even when surveys are feasible, federal and state regulations controlling forms' clearance may negate the use of this method.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

The issue identification phase specifies the problems in the topic area and, thus, formulates expectations for the types of practices/programs that will be identified. The degree of precision achieved during this problem-specification phase will influence the nomination and selection requirements. After determining the issues or needs to be addressed, the purpose may require modification. If the purpose was determined with limited knowledge of the topic, it may be inappropriate. Familiarity with the issue is prerequisite to proceeding; however, continued clarification of issues and even awareness of new issues is likely to occur throughout the EPI process.

Issue delineation often is not a discrete phase. Many activities that have the primary function of identifying issues also function to obtain practice/program nominations or to identify dissemination outlets. For instance, when interviewees are contacted to obtain information on issues it is often possible to begin the nomination process as well. If it is premature to solicit formal nominations, it is at least possible to begin to set up a nomination network. Information about specific practices/programs can be gained, and persons to participate in selection or dissemination phases may be identified. Although it is possible, and often wise, to capitalize on the interview at this initial phase to obtain additional information, the purpose of the interview should be paramount, and additional information should be solicited only if it is clearly appropriate to do so.

A review of the literature is a method that can also bring to light experts in the field to contact, potential practices/programs, and related materials and areas of endeavor that the project should review.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DECISION

What problem or need are you addressing?

What are the components of each problem or need?

Who or what can best describe these components?

What practices have already been attempted to deal with these issues?

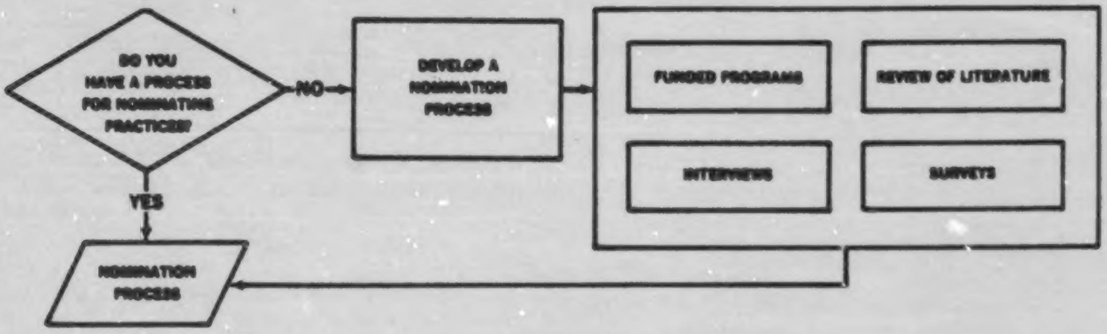
Which issues or needs are most critical for your project to address?

OUTCOME

An identification of the issues will include a(n):

- well-defined list of specific issues in priority order;
- description of previous and existing methods to address these issues; and
- identification of barriers to overcoming issues/needs.

C. NOMINATION PROCESS


DO YOU HAVE A PROCESS FOR NOMINATING PRACTICES?
NO
YES
DEVELOP A NOMINATION PROCESS
FUNDED PROGRAMS
REVIEW OF LITERATURE
INTERVIEWS
SURVEYS
NOMINATION PROCESS

DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

Once a purpose has been determined and the issues identified, the next step in the process is to solicit nominations. In soliciting nominations, what is being sought is a pool of sites that are believed to have effective practices/programs. There are several methods to solicit nominations; these methods are what we have referred to as the nomination process.

Funded Programs. Programs that receive funds (e.g., for development) may automatically constitute the nominated programs or may provide a source of nominees.

Interviews. Nominations of effective practices may be solicited through interviews, networking, conferences, or conversations with knowledgeable persons.

Literature Review. A search of published or unpublished project descriptions and reports can be undertaken to identify nominees.

Surveys. Another way to solicit nominations is to send letters, brochures, newsletters, and other materials through the mail or in journal ads to persons who may have knowledge about sites containing effective practices.

OVERVIEW

A significant problem associated with the nomination process is to obtain an adequate number of qualified sites that address the issues without receiving so many nominations that an unwarranted amount of time and money must be spent simply in eliminating those that do not meet accepted standards of quality. A related problem is obtaining accurate and sufficient information to determine which sites warrant further investigation.

Resolving these problems will require grappling, to some extent, with the following three factors. First, a determination must be made regarding the most appropriate source for nominations. Generally, the closer one can get to receiving information from practitioners (those persons actually implementing the practice/program) the more accurate the information will be that is received. Second, a method for soliciting nominations must be determined. The method used must take into consideration the amount of staff time that will be devoted to the process, the money available to solicit nominations, the familiarity with and knowledge of the sites needed, the existence of networks which may be tapped, and the political nature of the process. The third factor is the complexity of the information desired. For example, if only site names are needed, a quick call to a few knowledgeable persons may be adequate; however, if a thorough description of the practice/program is needed, then sources containing such information or persons with first-hand knowledge must be contacted. Whatever methods are used it is necessary to clearly articulate the practice/program features that the EPI project is seeking. Without clear specification, nominations are often based on a halo effect and programs will be referred simply because they are considered good, not because they possess the characteristics of interest.

The nomination process is facilitated by the use of funded programs as they are easily identifiable through the funding agency, often have information available describing the program, and are usually cooperative with EPI projects since many funded programs are required by the funding agency to disseminate information. These programs have essentially been prescreened for quality (i.e., by the funding agency) and often represent innovative methods for resolving issues of concern.

Unless the EPI project is limited in its mission to look only at specific funded programs (e.g., as is the mandate of certain federally-funded networks) we do not recommend that projects look at funded programs exclusively as other programs not receiving funding may have effective practices/programs that warrant identification. Additionally, information on these programs is not as likely to be disseminated by other sources. A major consideration should be obtaining quality practices/programs that are relevant to the issues of interest.

When soliciting nominations, the decision to interview 'experts' or 'practitioners' appears to be related to a variety of factors. Experts are more easily identifiable, are familiar with more programs and, thus, should be able to provide more recommendations and should have a comparative basis on which to recommend quality programs. Practitioners are more knowledgeable of the program they are recommending and should be able to provide detailed information on the practice/program. When documenting a program, the determination of whom to interview is primarily based on the information desired; generally, the person implementing a practice/program is the most knowledgeable person, although interviews with other personnel are desirable to 1) verify information, and 2) determine the relationship of the practice/program to the broader program context.

Other concerns regarding the use of interviews and surveys have been discussed in the section on delineation of issues. A final caution should be mentioned regarding the use of a literature review to nominate practices/programs: This method is likely to result in a large number of nominated programs which are no longer in operation; thus, oversampling is recommended.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

The breadth and depth of the issues as defined in the previous step will guide the researcher in determining the parameters of the nomination processes. It is likely that a study of issues will have already generated a beginning list of potential nominators.

Another review of the purpose step is advisable. If the purpose has political ramifications (e.g., allotting public funds; providing information for state or federal dissemination), the nomination process will need to reach out to all qualified, potential nominees.

If done well, the nomination process can save time in the selection phase ahead by tapping appropriate nomination sources and collecting the information critical to first-level screening.

QUESTIONS

How many nominations are needed to insure coverage of identified issues?

How many nominators will be needed to acquire the desired number of nominations?

What information is needed to begin the selection process?

Who is the best source of this information?

What is the best way to contact the nominators to get the information you need at this point, keeping budget and time constraints in mind?

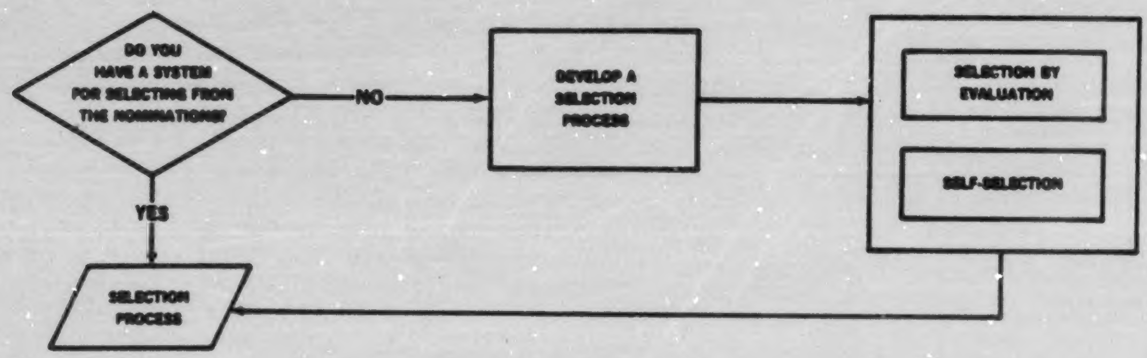
Are there political considerations?

OUTCOMES

A description of the nomination process will include:

- steps to be carried out and a time frame for each step;
- sources of nominators (by role) and an estimated number of nominators;
- a strategy to reach the nominators;
- an estimated number of nominations required; and
- the type of information required for each nomination.

D. SELECTION PROCESS


DO YOU HAVE A SYSTEM FOR SELECTING FROM THE NOMINATIONS?
NO
YES
DEVELOP A SELECTION PROCESS
SELECTION BY EVALUATION
SELF-SELECTION
SELECTION PROCESS

DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

Once nominations for effective practices/programs have been collected, there must be some process engaged in by which nominated sites are reviewed to determine their inclusion or exclusion as effective practices/programs. A selection process may be one of two types:

Selection by Evaluation. Selection by evaluation requires that knowledgeable persons not affiliated with the site determine whether a site qualifies as an effective practice/program by comparing it to a predetermined set of selection criteria.

Self-Selection. In the case of self-selection, the staff members at a practice/program site make the decision that their practice/program should be included as an effective practice/program. The staff members at the site determine that their practice/program is effective and merits recognition.

OVERVIEW

The selection process establishes the method to use to determine which practices/programs are effective. The process of determining that a practice/program is "effective" is one in which many persons' senses of "effective" come into play. The selection process is one of corroboration; project staff, experts and practitioners contacted by the project, and site staff all bring their perceptions of "effectiveness" to bear. Essentially, a kind of evidence-building occurs such that multiple sources and perspectives are incorporated in the decision process.

Three factors influence the decision to use selection-by-evaluation. Primary among these factors is the degree of assurance desired regarding the quality of the practices/programs that are selected. When high quality is desired, the selection process tends to be more elaborate and incorporates the type of objectivity provided by those not engaged in the process. Thus, selection-by-evaluation is required. Often a number of selection iterations (i.e., repetitions) will be performed with each stage requiring additional information and stiffer criteria. The number of evaluators may increase as well. This progressively stricter evaluation is implemented to ensure that quality is obtained, but the progressive nature results from the second factor affecting the process--cost and time constraints. Application of a strict and elaborate criteria by a number of judges to reach a decision regarding site inclusion or exclusion is a costly and time consuming process. By progressively increasing the elements to consider and the number of evaluators the number of practices/programs to consider simultaneously decreases and cost and time factors are kept to a minimum. A third factor which influences the selection process is the credibility required of the process. Projects which fund practices/programs or result in national or state-wide dissemination of information must be viewed as fair and representative both by sites considered and consumers. The political nature of such efforts is such that some form of outside evaluation is desirable.

Material available for review may include program materials developed by the site, evaluation data, descriptive information which may include the nomination materials, interview data, and any information collected during a preliminary site visit. Whatever is collected, it should provide sufficient data to determine whether or not the selection criteria is met. The selection process should specify the procedures for applying the selection criteria including which criteria are to be applied during each phase of the process (if more than one phase exists) and by whom.

Self-selection is advantageous when little time or money exists to go through an elaborate evaluation process and when it is desirable to include all possible practices/programs (e.g., the purpose is to let other sites know what is happening, not necessarily to determine the quality of practices/programs) or when there is reason to believe that high quality practices will self-select (e.g., end goal is a presentation of practices to peers and only those who feel confident of program quality will present).

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

This step can occur concurrently with the step of developing criteria. Here we are concerned with how to select the best programs/practices for our purposes; whereas, in developing criteria we are concerned with the descriptors for what will characterize the best programs/practices.

Development of the selection process is dependent upon the nomination process in that we work with the information and materials collected during the nomination phase. One consideration in self-selection is the adequacy of the nomination process to define and identify all potential practices/programs. It may be desirable to solicit the participation of particular sites if they do not self-select. An additional concern is the limiting of the number of participants. It may be desirable to limit the number of participants on a first come basis or to accept all sites self-selecting before a certain date.

The selection process is also closely related to the documentation process ahead. Some--perhaps all--of the information required for documentation will have been collected and discussed during the nomination and selection phases.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DECISION

Should the selection be done by self-selection or evaluation?

If evaluation, who should the evaluator or team be?

What decision-making process (e.g., voting, concensus, individual judgment) should the evaluator or team use?

What information and materials should be used to make the selection decision?

How many iterations of the evaluation process should be used? Would these vary as to evaluator(s), decision-making process, information used?

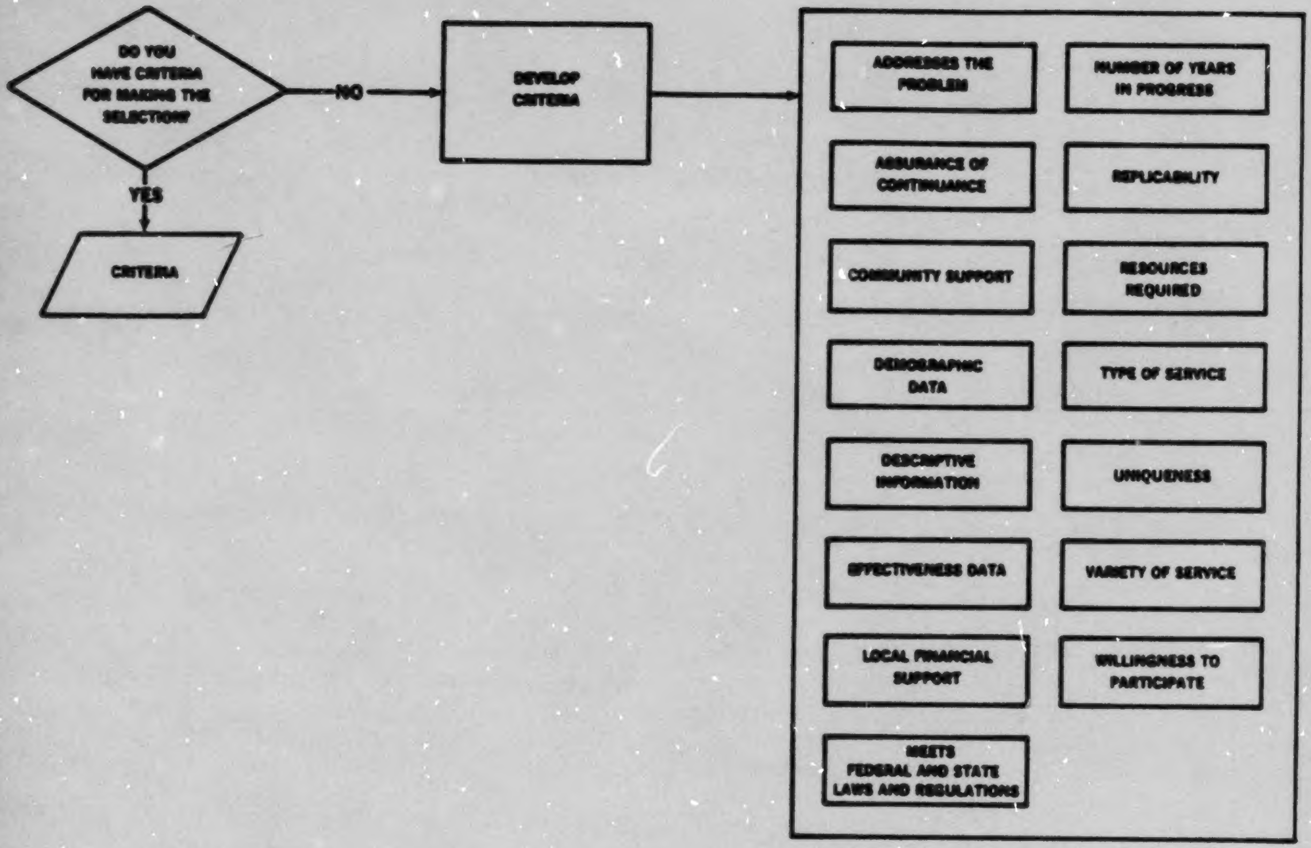
OUTCOME

A description of the selection process will include:

- a list of the person(s) responsible for making the selection;
- a description of the method for deciding; and
- a list of the materials or other information sources to be used in making the decision.

If there is more than one stage to the selection process, the above points will be described for each iteration.

E. SELECTION CRITERIA


DO YOU HAVE CRITERIA FOR MAKING THE SELECTION?
NO
YES
CRITERIA
DEVELOP CRITERIA
ADDRESSES THE PROBLEM
NUMBER OF YEARS IN PROGRESS
ASSURANCE OF CONTINUANCE
REPLICABILITY
COMMUNITY SUPPORT
RESOURCES REQUIRED
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
TYPE OF SERVICE
DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION
UNIQUENESS
EFFECTIVENESS DATA
VARIETY OF SERVICE
LOCAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT
WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE
MEETS FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

In addition to establishing a selection process to review nominated sites, there also must be a set of criteria to judge the effectiveness of the sites. The selection criteria determine what is a good practice/program.

There are many different types of criteria that might be used to judge the effectiveness of the practices/programs received in the nomination stage. We have grouped the criteria we found in our study into four categories.

Purpose Criteria

The inclusion of purpose criteria insures that the agency engaged in EPI will fulfill the intended purpose of the project. Only those criteria, however, that are in fact necessary to fulfilling the purpose should be included. Some possible purpose-related criteria are:

Assurance of Continuance. This criterion requires that the practice is in full operation and that there is reason to believe that it will exist in the future. This criterion would be particularly important if replication were the purpose.

Descriptive Information. This criterion requires the availability of a description of the project or of the materials or products it has developed. Often materials must be available for wide distribution.

Replicability. The replicability criterion requires a judgment that the practice/program is exportable; it can be adapted to other settings; it can be communicated to others with relative ease; or that it would be feasible for other sites to adopt.

Willingness to Participate. This criterion refers to the fact that the administration or staff of the practice/program are willing and able to participate in dissemination or replication activities.

Issue Criteria

Issue criteria insure that the practices address the problems that have been identified in the issue identification stage and that they serve the population of concern. Included under the issue criteria category are the following:

Addresses the Problem. This criterion is used to insure that the practice addresses the identified issue, need, or priority area. Subsumed within this criteria are all criteria which refer to identifying the best practices to respond to a problem area. This criterion includes the concept of timeliness: that the practice is in concert with the newest thinking in the field. It assures that the practice/program identified is relevant.

Demographic Data: Client Group Served. Inclusion of this criterion insures that the practice includes or is directed toward a specific type of student (e.g., disadvantaged) or a cross-section of students (e.g., students with all types of handicapping conditions).

Local Financial Support. This criterion requires that local community funds at least partially support the existence of the practice.

Type of Service. Type of service, as a criterion, means that the practice exemplifies a specific service delivery strategy that has been identified as particularly effective or needed (e.g., homebound service for preschool handicapped populations).

Project Criteria

Project criteria respond to the constraints of the agency identifying the effective practices/programs. For example, there might be only a limited amount of money available for travel; therefore, the project staff might find it necessary to locate practices/programs in a specific region of the country or look for sites containing more than one effective practice/program.

Demographic Data: Geographic Location. Geographic location refers to the practice/program being located in a specific region of the country.

Variety of Service. This criterion requires that there are a number of effective strategies at the site or that a range of educational services are offered.

Evaluation Criteria

The fourth category, evaluation criteria, relates specifically to the effectiveness of the practice/program across several dimensions--service, cost, stability, and legality.

Community Support. This criterion requires there to be evidence of a positive attitude toward the practice in the local community.

Effectiveness Data. The inclusion of effectiveness data as a criterion requires that positive outcomes from the practice can be shown based on formal or informal evaluation procedures. The specificity of this criterion can vary greatly from one project to another, but most projects seek either qualitative data, quantitative data, or some combination of the two. Qualitative effectiveness data is data on the outcomes or benefits of the practice/program based on informal evaluation procedures such as anecdotal information or posttest only studies. Quantitative evaluation data as we have used it, is data on the outcomes or benefits of practices/programs based on evaluation procedures that utilize experimental designs.

Meets Federal and State Laws and Regulations. This criterion requires that the practice complies with relevant federal or state laws or regulations.

Number of Years in Progress. Inclusion of this criterion requires some evidence of stability such as that the practice/program has existed for a designated number of years and that it has a history of success.

Resources Required. This criterion requires the judgment that the material and personnel costs involved in operating the practice are reasonable or particularly cost-effective.

Uniqueness. The criterion of uniqueness necessitates that reviewers determine that the practice/program accomplishes its goals in ways not typical of other practices of its type.

OVERVIEW

An important consideration in selecting criteria is the possible need for assigning weights to the criteria. Each criterion may not be equally important to the project. Weights may be numerical (e.g., some criteria are worth twice as much as others), based on order of inclusion (e.g., if the practice does not meet the first three criteria, it is eliminated), or on total number of criteria met (e.g., a practice is selected if it has 3 of 5 criteria). Probably each of the four types of criteria--issue, purpose, evaluative, and project--will need to be balanced against each other; otherwise, the project might end up with an outstanding program that was unwilling to participate in dissemination or a cost-effective program that did not address the issue at hand.

Throughout the criteria development phase of the EPI, the project staff will be struggling with the definition of "quality" and the fact that those practices/programs which meet the criteria will be labeled "effective." This responsibility can be eased somewhat by continually referring back to the purpose of the project. The practices/programs selected will need to be "effective" only in light of the purpose of the project. Whether quantitative or qualitative data is emphasized will depend on the level of confidence either or both will shed for the project consumer.

Considerations specific to each criterion are described below:

Addresses the Problem. Determining whether a specific program/practice meets this criterion is dependent on familiarity with the problem area (i.e., the problem that the programs/practices are being sought to address) and often requires that a thorough identification of the issues or a needs assessment be conducted.

Assurance of Continuance. This criterion is especially important when replication is a primary purpose. The continuance of a practice/program demonstrates support by those involved; thus, increasing confidence in its viability. Its existence also increases the likelihood that experienced staff will be available to assist in further refinement of the program/practice as well as in dissemination and replication activities.

Community Support. Since innovations are not always well-received, this criterion looks to community support as one measure of quality. Lack of support, however, may reflect the method of implementation more than a problem inherent in a given practice/program. For this reason, we recommend that implementation strategies be examined whenever an apparently good practice/program lacks community support. A related consideration is the definition of community: does this include program implementors, other professionals, administrators, students, or parents? Community should be explicitly defined prior to the evaluation of this criterion. Methods for identifying community support should ensure that information from all relevant groups is obtained.

Descriptive Information. Inclusion of this criterion generally results in identifying relatively sophisticated programs, those which have the expertise and time, due either to the duration or funding level, to devote to the development of descriptive information. This criterion is most valuable to the EPI project which has extremely limited resources for identifying programs because the availability of descriptive information can greatly facilitate the identification process. It is also valuable to projects concerned with dissemination and replication of practices/programs since the availability of descriptive information facilitates these processes. Limitations are that this criterion may eliminate new practices/programs that have not received special development funds. Additionally, this criterion may result in duplication of dissemination efforts.

Demographic Data: Client Group Served. In many EPI projects we found that the type of client group was understood and therefore not spelled out as a criterion. Other projects began with a broad definition of their client group and in later steps used more specific definitions composed generally of multiple characteristics (e.g., secondary, vocational education programs for the severely handicapped). Use of the more specific criteria enabled these projects to focus on a particular problem or subparts of the problem.

Determining the definition of the client group will strongly influence the generalizability that the project's results can have. Discoveries with a very narrow population must be questioned with regard to application to a broader group; whereas, work with a wide population can transfer further. Focusing on a very specific group can help to advance practice in a particularly problematic area and is one method of delimiting an EPI project. Clarifying this criteria prior to the nomination phase can assist in streamlining both the nomination and selection steps.

Demographic Data: Geographic Location. Limitation of practices/programs to a specific geographic area can serve a variety of purposes. For national EPI projects, it can be a method of reducing costs if site visits are planned. State EPI projects often implicitly include this criterion; they are interested only in practices or programs within the state. Other times, this criterion achieves representation of sites throughout an area. This is most important when sites are to assist in future training or replication activities. Utilization of this criterion has a major drawback: limitation of practice/program identification to a particular geographic location may result in elimination of the most effective or exemplary program.

Effectiveness Data. Major considerations in determining effectiveness criteria are the generalizability desired and the degree of confidence required before an EPI project is willing to apply an adjective such as "promising," "effective," "exemplary," or "best." Two contradictory perspectives are frequently expressed regarding a preference for one form of effectiveness data over the other. Those preferring quantitative effectiveness data maintain that the change process involves a considerable cost that should not be expended unless one is sure that the practice/program being adopted is truly an improvement which warrants the expense. They hold that such assurance of effectiveness is only possible when valid experimental designs are used. To the contrary, those preferring qualitative effectiveness data maintain that not all practices/programs warranting replication have the resources to conduct quantitative evaluations of their practice/program and that these are lost to other practitioners if qualitative data is not considered adequate. They also point to numerous difficulties inherent to quantitative studies in field-settings. Additionally qualitative information, such as implementation steps, is valuable in the replication process. Descriptive information regarding the context of the program development functions to increase the generalizability of the practice/program. For these reasons, recent evaluation literature has stressed the importance of combining qualitative data with quantitative studies. Cronbach (1982) has even questioned the emphasis on experimental designs in evaluation studies. It is critical for EPI projects to investigate issues related to program evaluation and to determine what form of effectiveness data is needed to identify practices/programs for the purpose of the project. It is critical for adopters to consider these issues as well as to determine the level of confidence required before a practice/program is to be adopted.

Local Financial Support. The wisdom of this criterion is supported by the literature on change which maintains that programs without local financial support fail to continue. To some extent, this criterion can be viewed as a yardstick to gauge the amount of community support, the assurance of program continuance, and the institutionalization of the practice/program. Of course, this criterion may not be relevant if the nomination is limited to funded projects.

Meets Federal and State Laws and Regulations. Often this criterion is implicit. It is a standard prerequisite for EPI projects funded by state or federal dollars. The EPI staff would be advised to make clear with their funding agency in the early development of the project the level and type of assurance they will require for this criterion. If a thorough review by the policy or compliance unit is required, the EPI staff will want to budget time for this process and will want to build in screening mechanisms for eliminating questionable programs early in the program (e.g., calling the SEA compliance unit to find out if an LEA is in compliance with the state and federal laws). The EPI staff would also be wise to clarify with their funding agency whether the total program has to be in compliance before publicizing a practice that is clearly in compliance.

Of course some areas of study (e.g., math, reading) that are not enmeshed in federal legislation (as is special education) will probably be able to proceed without concern to this topic.

Number of Years in Progress. An advantage of selecting sites that are "tried and true" is that they typically have worked out the many difficulties attached with initiation and implementation. An older project has also probably had to weather the blight of staff turnover--a severe test of a practice's/program's strength.

Replicability. There are several considerations connected with the use of this criterion. The EPI staff may become involved in detecting whether or not the success of the practice/program is really a result of the personalities involved in the project or of the practice/program itself. Separating the practice from people is not easy and the actual determination may rest finally on a subjective, experienced decision. The use of this criterion means giving consideration to the question, "Does the entire program need to be replicated in order for it to have the results experienced by the developer or can just a piece of the program be adapted/adopted and successfully create change?" This is another knotty question. The site may be able to supply some helpful insights; otherwise an experienced decision based on reference back to the project's purpose is the best resort. Related to the last question is the one of "How much can the practice/program be changed to fit a new site before it loses its integrity and thus its ability to have impact?" Some sites will have developed their practice/program to such a sophisticated level that they will have already helped others adapt/adopt their work and will have many printed media and human resources available to assist others. These sites offer proven replication strategies.

Resources Required. Often practices/programs that come to the attention of an EPI project have received financial assistance for development. If the primary purpose of the project is replication, it is important that the practices/programs identified can be replicated and maintained by local districts with available staff and funds. Thus, this consideration involves an evaluation of the benefits offered by a practice/program in comparison to the practice/program costs. This criterion is of less concern to those projects attempting to identify state-of-the-art practices/programs for other purposes such as research or training.

Type of Service. This criterion is based either on 1) a well-founded belief in the efficacy of a certain practice; or, 2) a need to identify efficacious practices of a particular type of service. The first basis frequently originates in the delineation-of-the-issues phase when a particular approach is advocated. The second basis usually is the result of a legal mandate as when mainstreaming was mandated and practitioners sought model programs to replicate. This criterion helps delimit the programs sought; thus, it is useful to projects with limited resources if it is made known early in the project (i.e., during the nomination phase).

Uniqueness. Some EPI projects use this criterion when they are faced with a broad array of possibilities and want to avoid redundancy. Others use it because they are dealing with a tired problem that needs new answers. In either case, the number of nominated practices/programs that meet the uniqueness criteria will depend on 1) the breadth of the nomination process and thus the number of nominees; 2) the exposure the EPI staff has had and, thus, their definition of "unique;" and 3) the history and importance of the problem.

Variety of Service. Use of this criterion may be motivated by a desire to stretch dollars and get a maximum number of practices. This is most likely when site visits are the method of documentation. When working with a variety of related practices at one site, the EPI project staff will have a harder time singling out the effect of each individually. Also, there will be the need to schedule more time for the visit and care will need to be taken to assure having appointments with the extended number of critical informers.

Willingness to Participate. This criterion requires that the EPI project be clear about its definition of "participate." Will it mean being available for site visits? Would the visits be frequent or on a limited basis? Will site staff be needed to assist with the provision of training? Will materials need to be made available? LEAs will want enough of a description to make an informed commitment of their resources or to decline on the basis that the rest of their programs and perhaps even the effective practice, might be harmed by too much attention given to dissemination.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

In developing the criteria the researchers will rely on the purpose-setting step for purpose criteria and on the issue-delineation step for the issue criteria.

The nomination step is also related in that some of the criteria will have been itemized for that step. Specificity of criteria during the nomination phase is advantageous as it assists in the nomination of relevant practices/ programs. For instance, nominators might be asked to nominate only those practices/programs that are at the senior high school level. If the EPI project is one that allots funds to competitive bidders, full disclosure of all criteria should be made at the time of the nomination process. The selection process and the selection criteria must be developed to work together. For example, if the selection process is to be a 3-phase process, then 3 levels of criteria should be established. Conversely, if the criteria are long and involved, requiring in-depth program information, it is advisable to develop a multi-phased selection process so that programs can be eliminated if they do not meet preliminary criteria. There is no clear-cut procedure for relating selection process and criteria. Both must be developed cooperatively.

The criteria that are developed will become the heart of the selection process step. In developing the criteria the researchers will rely on the purpose-setting step for purpose criteria and on the issue-delineation step for the issue criteria. There is also a relation to the documentation step since it is that step in which the practice/program is validated as having met the criteria.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DECISION

Given the stated purposes, what criteria will ensure that the purposes are achieved?

Given the issues identified, what criteria will assure that practices/programs identified respond to these issues?

Given resource constraints, what criteria will maximize project resources?

Are all criteria of equal importance? If not, how is differential weight applied?

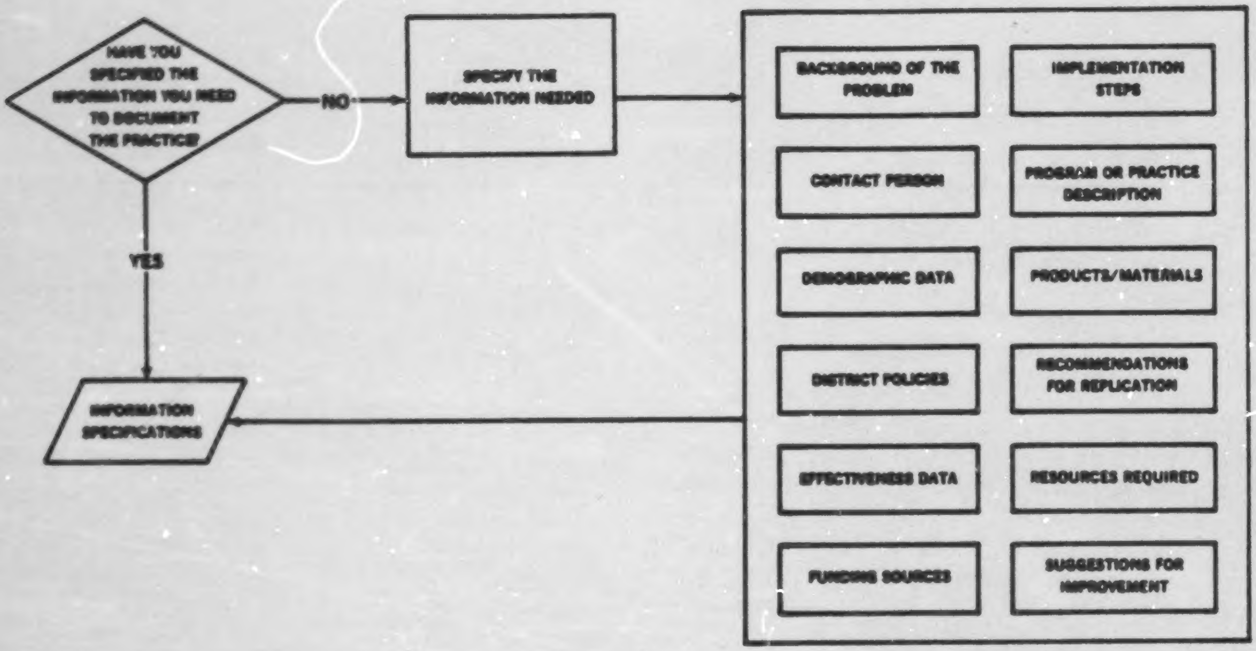
Do criteria parallel the selection process?

OUTCOME

Criteria include:

- a list of critical characteristics which a program/practice must possess to be considered;
- operational definitions of these critical characteristics;
- critical characteristics that are purpose-related, issue-related, evaluation-related, and project-related;
- weighted characteristics, if they are of differential importance;
- explicit standards for practices/programs that will be retained and eliminated (e.g., any practice that is out of compliance with federal regulations will not be considered);
- criteria to be used in each iteration clearly specified if iterations are part of the selection process.

F. INFORMATION NEEDED


HAVE YOU SPECIFIED THE INFORMATION YOU NEED TO DOCUMENT THE PRACTICE?
NO
SPECIFY THE INFORMATION NEEDED
YES
INFORMATION SPECIFICATIONS
BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS
CONTACT PERSON
PROGRAM OR PRACTICE DESCRIPTION
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
PRODUCTS/MATERIALS
DISTRICT POLICIES
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATION
EFFECTIVENESS DATA
RESOURCES REQUIRED
FUNDING SOURCES
SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

In the step that accompanies this one, Documentation Procedures, we discuss the how of information collection, that is, the different methods of obtaining desired information about the effective practices/programs. In the Information Needed step we turn to the what of information collection--the actual information about a practice that can be collected.

There are many different categories of information that might be collected about a practice.

The Background of the Problem includes the motivating factors or purpose for initiating the practice/program.

The Contact Person is a person at the site to contact if more information is desired about the practice/program.

Demographic Data typically includes a description of the geographic setting in which the practice/program operates or the characteristics of the population served.

District Policies include those policies at the site which influenced the implementation or operation of the practice/program.

Effectiveness Data provides formal or informal evaluation information which describes the outcomes or benefits of the practice.

The Funding Sources are the agencies from which money was obtained to initiate or operate the practice.

The Implementation Steps are the planning procedures or actions engaged in to initiate the practice/program, including any problems encountered.

A Practice/Program Description includes the objectives, strategies, essential components, curriculum, or philosophy.

Products/Materials provide any information about a practice/program that is available for distribution from the site, or is integral to the practice/program but may be available from other sources, such as curriculum materials.

Recommendations for Replication are any additional information from practice/program staff that will assist in the adoption or adaptation of the practice/program at a new site.

Resources Required include the materials, equipment, or facilities; information on the expenditures; and information about the occupational positions, expertise, and training to implement and operate the practice/program.

Suggestions for Improvement include the modifications the practice/program staff believe would improve the practice/program and could be incorporated if implemented at a new site.

OVERVIEW

When collecting information, it is important to collect only that information which is really needed. There is no point to collecting more than will be used and thus wasting time and dollars. The burden to site personnel of providing information should be considered. Reference to the purpose statement will remind the researcher of what type of information is likely to be most useful. Of course, make sure that all the information that will be needed is collected. Much time is wasted if many second and third calls have to be made in order to acquire information that could have easily been collected the first time around. The way to prevent this error is to plan carefully. Review and think through all of the steps of the EPI process before firming up the list of information to be collected. (Invariably there will be gaps that the researcher will need to fill with a second call, but keeping these to a minimum is advised.)

Closely related to the above issue is that of determining how structured or unstructured to make the list of information that is to be collected. If it is too tight and precise the researcher might miss important information that the program staff would otherwise volunteer. Somehow a balance must be struck between enough structure to obtain all the needed information and enough openness to obtain new insights.

The list of information to be collected must respond to the purpose of the project and the delineation of the issues. The value of collecting each of the categories of information identified is described below:

Background of the Problem. This information provides a rationale for the practice/program and a context for the implementation steps. Potential adopters may recognize their own needs in the background description and, consequently give greater consideration to the practice/program.

Contact Person. Providing information on a contact person permits potential adopters to learn about a practice/program from those directly involved. This increases the likelihood of adoption. However, it requires the willingness of site personnel to engage in dissemination activities. It also requires that the contact person is likely to remain at the site over a period of time, or at least that the role (e.g., Program Coordinator) and address remain unchanged.

Demographic Data. Demographic data is most helpful in defining the context in which a practice/program was successful. Thus, it assists in determining what settings and populations the practice/program is most likely to generalize to successfully. Characteristics of the educational environment,(e.g., school size and staffing), are useful. Characteristics of the population should be carefully and thoroughly described. Information such as the age, academic functioning, behavioral characteristics, ethnic or racial characteristics may be relevant. Additionally, studies that involve specially identified groups (e.g., educationally handicapped or gifted) should clearly describe the eligibility criteria and identification process as this information will help to clarify the population characteristics.

District Policies. The support or resistance encountered by an innovative program often is related to the policies of the LEA. Provision of this information provides a context for the implementation steps and can aid other sites in their analysis of the practice's/program's appropriateness for adoption.

Effectiveness Data. The types of and purposes for collecting effectiveness data have been discussed in the section on selection criteria. Presentation of this information permits reviewers of the EPI project to assess the quality of the practice/program. If available, effectiveness data should be provided.

Funding Sources. Because funding is often a critical consideration in establishing new programs, information on funding sources provides models of creative funding that can assist adopters.

Implementation Steps. Information on the implementation process can assist adopters in anticipating the stages necessary to implement the process. The experience of the developing site in implementing the practice/program can assist others in avoiding pitfalls. Provision of information on implementation steps, therefore, is most useful when the EPI project purpose includes replication directly, or indirectly through dissemination.

Program or Practice Description. The description delineates the substance of the practice/program. Consideration should be given to the information that is needed to clearly communicate to the intended audience. Limitations on the length of the final product must be taken into account as well. The description of the practice/program should inform the audience about what is done, how it is accomplished, and by whom, using what methods and materials. When the EPI project focus is practices, it is advisable to provide some program description as well. This gives a context for the practice operation.

Products/materials may have been developed to support the practice/program in a number of ways: For instance materials may communicate practice/program philosophy or goals, train staff to implement the practice/program, or be used directly by students as part of the instructional program. Whatever the function, the materials integral to an identified practice/program are of interest to EPI project consumers. Information on such materials might include their purpose, development, contents, uses, cost, relation to the practice/program, and method for obtaining the materials. As with the listing of a contact person, site cooperation is required if materials are to be made available.

Recommendation for Replication. Site personnel may provide recommendations for which portions of a practice/program are essential to the outcomes. Based on their experience in the development and implementation of the practice/program, they may be able to suggest adaptations that would enhance the effectiveness of the practice/program in a particular setting. Obtaining this information often requires personal contact with site staff as little information on replication is likely to be in written form. Provision of the best information on replication may require a careful combination of the experiences of site staff and the expertise of the EPI project staff utilizing knowledge of the replication literature.

Resources Required. Financial and human resources used to operate a practice/program should be carefully described. Resources used should be distinguished from essential resources whenever feasible. Thorough description of resources will include: materials, equipment, facilities, staffing, and cost information. Staffing should include educational and professional characteristics and practice/program specific training. Creative staffing patterns or unusual talents that have influenced program success warrant mentioning. Cost data should be described in terms of staff positions, facility requirements, etc. rather than dollar values which are subject to geographic and temporal variation.

Suggestions for Improvement. This information capitalizes on the wisdom of the site staff that results from their cumulative experiences both during development and implementation. Many practices/programs are constantly evolving and the site staff have plans to improve the very practices/programs that are being documented.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

The information phase specifies what content to collect regarding identified practices/programs, while the documentation phase focuses on the process that will be undertaken to collect the information. The information phase provides the material for the dissemination or replication functions.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DECISION

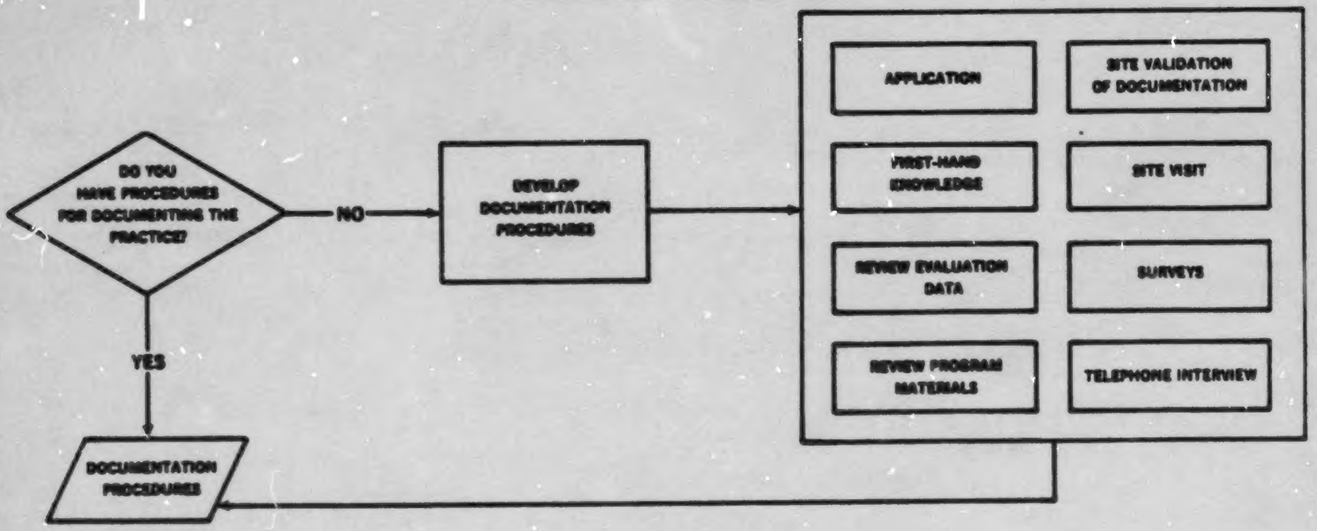
What information is essential to adequately describe the practice/program so that the intended purpose will be attained?

OUTCOME

Information specifications will include:

- a list of the general categories, or types, of information needed; and
- the specific information that should be collected under each category.

G. DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES


DO YOU HAVE PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENTING THE PRACTICE?
NO
DEVELOP DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES
APPLICATION
SITE VALIDATION OF DOCUMENTATION
FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE
SITE VISIT
REVIEW EVALUATION DATA
SURVEYS
REVIEW PROGRAM MATERIALS
TELEPHONE INTERVIEW
YES
DOCUMENTATION PROCEDURES

DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

Once a certain number of practices/programs have been selected as meeting the established selection criteria, the next step in the process is to obtain sufficient information about the practices/programs to fulfill the purpose for identifying them in the first place. There are a variety of methods by which a description of a practice can be obtained.

Application. The description of a practice/program can be taken from the nomination application submitted by the site.

First-Hand Knowledge. A description of the practice/program can be written based on knowledge of it by the representatives of the agency conducting the effective practice search or by the program staff. This method of documentation is used most frequently with self-selection. It also occurs when a funded program is required to disseminate information about its practices. Occasionally an agency representative will have prior knowledge of a practice/program that is sufficient for documentation.

Review Evaluation Data. Formal or informal evaluation information, such as from an evaluation report, can be used to develop a description of the practice.

Review Program Materials. Another way to develop a description of the practice/program is to base the description on the products from a site, such as site descriptions or curricular materials.

Site Validation of Documentation. Site validation refers to the practice of returning the written description of the practice/program to the site for site staff to assess the accuracy of the description.

Site Visit. Sometimes observations and interviews are conducted at effective practice/program sites to obtain a description of the practice/program.

Surveys. A description of the practice/program can be based on the written responses of practice/program staff to a questionnaire.

Telephone Interview. A description of the practice/program can be based on telephone conversations with practice/program staff.

OVERVIEW

The purpose of documentation is to verify that the practice/program is effective or to investigate how the practice/program came to be and what might be done to duplicate it. With the former purpose, verification, the researchers are again confronted with the degree of confidence needed in the quality of the practice/program. With the latter purpose, the researchers will concern themselves with selecting those features which will be important for dissemination and replication.

An important issue in the documentation phase is to determine how much of the information can be obtained indirectly and how much will require direct contact. Will reviewing materials suffice, or will an interview or even observation be needed? If a rigorous examination of the practice/program is required, more sophisticated skills from the researcher are needed along with a larger budget. However, the more thorough the documentation, the more the processes of verification and investigation are optimized. Of course, utilization of a combination of documentation methods can further increase the credibility and usefulness of the documentation process.

Advantages and disadvantages of each documentation method include:

Application. Used to disseminate information about funded programs, this method of documentation is efficient and inexpensive. It is most feasible when the site must prepare, or has available, descriptive information as when the site responds to an RFP.* The information can be prepared by the site according to prerequisite specifications or can be extracted from site-developed materials by staff of the EPI project. Information provided in this way tends to be somewhat general in nature; it is most effective when the documentation attempts merely to provide an overview of the practice/program.

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*request for proposal

First-Hand Knowledge. Documentation based on first-hand knowledge of a site is advantageous as it generally involves a more extensive knowledge of a practice's/program's development and operation. The disadvantage is that a person with first-hand knowledge may lack the objectivity of a less-involved reviewer.

Review Evaluation Data. This method of documentation benefits from its ease and efficiency. Use of an evaluation report is considered more objective than descriptive information alone. However, the documentation process is dependent on information provided in the report which may not contain all relevant data; for instance, implementation information may be omitted. Developing a standard set of information to present regarding practices/programs may be impossible as reports from different sites are not likely to contain the same type of information. Generally, documentation based exclusively on evaluation data is not recommended although evaluation data in conjunction with other information can be most useful.

Review Program Materials. As with documentation based on other written material alone, this method of documentation may result in a general account of the practice/program with many details missing. It also limits the documentation process to the more sophisticated programs which have received funding for development. On the other hand, site-developed materials can provide a rich source of information regarding a practice/program and should be incorporated into the documentation process whenever available.

Site Validation of Documentation. This procedure is favorable in that it makes the description a cooperative effort between the EPI project and the site. If negative statements are included in the documentation, this procedure may entail delicate interactions between the EPI staff and site personnel. Responsibility for the final form of the documentation should be determined early in the identification process and clearly communicated to sites. Whether or not controversy between project and site staff is an issue, we feel that site validation of the documentation is not only a courtesy to the site personnel but is important to the accuracy and credibility of the project.

Site Visits. Site visits provide an opportunity for EPI staff to interact with site personnel and consumers. Site visits are beneficial as this interaction and observation can stimulate inquiries and lead to a more precise understanding of the practice/program. Site visits provide an opportunity to validate descriptive information as well. They are especially valuable when little information on good practices/programs is available and research is needed. Useful information that may not have been sought directly is much more likely to be discovered with site visits than with any other method of documentation. The human element makes site visits a favored method when continued interaction between the EPI project and the site is anticipated. The drawback to site visits is the expense of travelling and the increased staff time required. A related consideration is the number of staff to send and the amount of time staff should remain on site. Projects we have reviewed have consistently recommended sending two persons to a site to improve the thoroughness and accuracy of the information obtained. Observation can include facilities or programs in action. The latter is more time consuming and may be disruptive to the site; however, it provides insight into the actual implementation of the practice/program. These factors must be weighed against cost and time constraints.

Survey and Telephone Interview. The advantages and disadvantages inherent in these methods have been described previously (see Delineate Issues, p.). With regard to the documentation phase, both methods attempt to solicit needed information from sites. Therefore, surveys and telephone interviews are frequently used in addition to review of existing documents. These methods do not achieve the same degree of involvement and opportunity for interaction possible in site visits. Thus, they form a middle-ground between review of documents and site visits.

While making decisions regarding how to document, the researcher needs also to consider how much latitude to allow in diverging from a structured documentation strategy to obtain additional information. Also, an attitude of openness, rather than adherence to preconceived ideas, will help to elicit unique solutions to the problems for which the effective practices/programs are being sought. Direct approaches, such as interviews or observations, tend to be uniquely suited to acquiring this type of information.

When planning for documentation, the researcher must also consider whether or not to request site validation of the information collected and writen by the EPI staff. This process can be used to clarify any remaining questions or ambiguities as well as serve as a courtesy to the site.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

The documentation step and information step run parallel to each other, with the one structuring the process and the other the content. The documentation step is guided by the nomination, selection, and criteria development steps with regards to how to collect the next layer of information. Information provided during the nomination and selection phases can be used for documentation. Finally, the documentation step is related to the dissemination step ahead. The product of documentation (typically a written description of the effective practices/programs) is often the dissemination product.

QUESTIONS

What is the purpose for documenting the practice?

Can required information be obtained indirectly or is a more direct approach required?

If a direct approach is required, do project resources permit a site visitation?

Do project staff have the skills necessary to conduct site visits and/or document practices/programs or is training required?

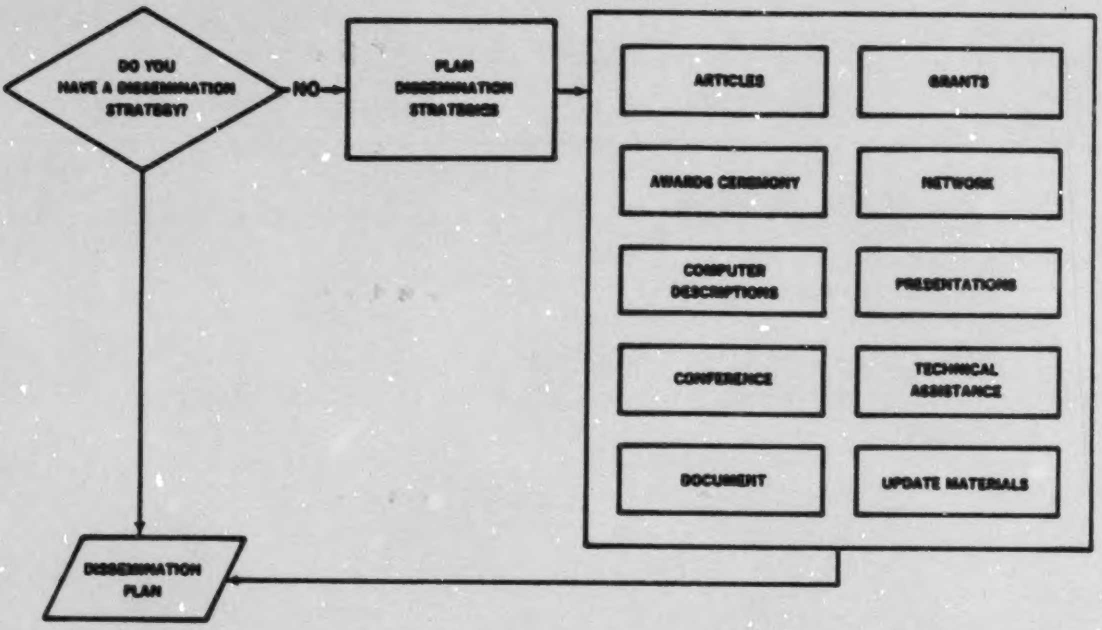
What is the most efficient system for the site staff to review the documentation prior to dissemination?

OUTCOME

Documentation procedures include:

- a description of the procedures that will be used to obtain the information about the programs/practices, including specific activities, timelines, and persons responsible.

H. DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES


DO YOU HAVE A DISSEMINATION STRATEGY?
NO
PLAN DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES
ARTICLES
GRANTS
AWARDS CEREMONY
NETWORK
COMPUTER DESCRIPTIONS
PRESENTATIONS
CONFERENCE
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
DOCUMENT
UPDATE MATERIALS
DISSEMINATION PLAN

DEFINITION OF TERMS

A dissemination strategy is a plan describing the specific techniques that will be used to distribute the information that has been collected about effective practices/programs. There are numerous ways this information can be distributed.

Articles are brief descriptions of the EPI project and specific practices or programs identified. Articles may be incorporated into existing newsletters or professional journals or they may be grouped into specialized bulletins or newsletters distributed by the EPI project.

An Awards Ceremony is a meeting at which effective practice/program staff are honored.

Computer Descriptions are computerized practice/program abstracts retrievable through electronic data bases such as SpecialNet or SPIF/SPIN.*

A Conference is an educational fair specifically designed to disseminate information about effective practices/programs.

Documents provide comprehensive descriptions of single or multiple practices/programs. These comprehensive descriptions typically are contained in project reports, compendia, or proceedings documents.

*SpecialNet is an electronic telecommunication system including a data base of effective practices/programs specifically for special education. SPIF/SPIN is a data base of effective practices/programs for the field of education in general.

Grants provide a monetary award to practice/program staff for the purpose of disseminating information about their practice/program.

A Network is a system whose purpose is to distribute information about effective practices/programs, such as the National Diffusion Network.

Presentations are speeches or addresses describing effective practices/programs made at workshops or educational conventions.

Technical Assistance is consultative services provided by the EPI project to help the identified effective practices/programs distribute information about themselves or to link them with those in the field who might find the information useful. These services may be provided to other persons who are to act as linking agents (e.g., SEA staff).

Update of Materials refers to the set of activities engaged in to make information current that has previously been collected on effective practices/programs.

OVERVIEW

Developing a dissemination plan means designing a strategy to get the results of the EPI project into the hands of those who will use them to improve programs. The beginning step requires the project staff to once more review the project's original purpose. For what purpose were the effective practices/programs identified? Dissemination materials will differ if the purpose of the effort is to develop awareness, to excite to action, or to provide a working knowledge of a practice/program. Further questions for consideration are, who needs the information and will be encouraged to put it to use? Once the target groups have been identified, the means to best reach them must be determined. The type of material and the way it is written must be considered with the audience in mind. If multiple-audiences are anticipated, different materials might need to be developed. Budget permitting, the use of multiple dissemination strategies is advisable. Multiple strategies can broadcast the information further and can also respond to the preferred style of the recipient (i.e., verbal, in writing; how-to format, abstract; etc.). In other words, the issue at hand is how to best market the EPI project's outcomes. Continuation of the dissemination effort over an extended period of time should be considered as well. The initial dissemination plan should include methods to perpetuate the materials after their initial production (e.g., materials could be added to the publication lists of professional associations).

Too often dissemination plans are left for the end of a project. A better, more cost-effective, scheme is to begin dissemination plans at the beginning of the project and supply the details as the project proceeds. In this manner, realistic dissemination costs will be built into the budget of the project. Information, materials, or audio visual aids important to dissemination will be collected throughout the phases of the project and retracing steps at the end will be avoided. A caution regarding this plan-ahead scheme, however, is to not be so well-planned that new ways of packaging the information to suit particular audiences are overlooked.

To stretch the dissemination dollar the project staff may consider using existing dissemination mechanisms (e.g., SpecialNet, professional organizations' newsletters, national conferences, etc.). The advantages and disadvantages of other dissemination methods follow:

Articles. The EPI project may find that space for one or more of their articles or effective practice/program descriptions is available in another agency's or organization's newsletter. This strategy could assure broad dissemination of the material in a cost-effective manner. Development of their own newsletter or series of newsletters will be a time-consuming process requiring diverse expertise on the part of the EPI staff. An additional concern is the availability of mailing lists to reach the desired audience.

An Awards Ceremony accomplishes two important tasks at the same time: 1) gives recognition to practitioners for their contributions to the field and 2) publicizes the practices/programs.

Computerized Descriptions. Advantages of using computerized data bases are several. The practice/program information can quickly be put into the hands of users and can avoid delays often involved in printing materials. Updating the material can be accomplished electronically in a highly time efficient manner. With more sophisticated systems (e.g., SPIF/SPIN) the information can be retrieved prescriptively so that the user receives only those abstracts that address his/her problem or issue. The major disadvantage is that submitting information to some of the data bases or retrieving information may be somewhat costly. This strategy also requires consideration of the type and number of subscribers they serve, the amount of information they can accommodate, whether a particular format is used, and the length of time the material would be on the computer.

Conferences. Dissemination conferences have the advantage of bringing together practice/program developers and potential adopters. Costs and preparation time are major constraints to this method. Additionally, conferences often are one time affairs. Ongoing dissemination strategies should be combined with this method.

Document. Almost all EPI projects develop some form of document. This does not mean, however, that all such documents are appropriate for dissemination of the practices/programs identified. EPI project documents often contain the most comprehensive information available on both the project and the individual practices/programs. The thoroughness of most documents makes them especially valuable; however, they are often cumbersome and difficult to use. Their expense also precludes wide distribution in many instances. If the document is to be disseminated, care should be given to develop a format that makes accessing practice/program information easy. Advance notice regarding a document's availability can increase its exposure to the desired audience.

Grants. This strategy can be highly effective in disseminating a particular practice/program. It capitalizes on the energy and dedication that the developers have for their projects. Often the strategies that they design for their grant proposals are imaginative, field-wise systems for encouraging others to adopt their particular practice/program. In reviewing dissemination grant bids the EPI staff will want to assure that the developer has anticipated the steps needed for the healthy continuance of the practice/program itself while attention is being given to dissemination, too.

Network. Utilization of established dissemination networks capitalizes on the skills of experienced linking agents and saves EPI staff a considerable amount of effort. Selection of a network requires consideration of the network's formatting requirements and effectiveness criteria, consideration of the type and amount of information accommodated, the amount of publicity provided, and the audience of the network. Meeting the requirements of existing networks may be time consuming. Because of the general nature of most networks, the audience reached and the information provided may not be completely appropriate. Thus, few EPI projects will want to depend on this method of dissemination alone.

Presentations are efficient methods of reaching practitioners with effective practice/program information. Educators have been known to prefer information presented orally over other methods. Presentations provide an opportunity for interaction between potential adopters, EPI staff, and, possibly, program developers. Practice/program materials can be reviewed as well. Another advantage is that presentations occur during the meetings or conventions of existing organizations and thus are more cost-effective than specially planned dissemination conferences. However, presentations require functioning within the confines of the existing structure; like networks, the structure and audience may not be the most appropriate ones for the EPI project.

Technical Assistance. This form of dissemination establishes a network of persons knowledgeable about the identified practices/programs and with skills to disseminate this information. It is especially advantageous if the EPI project is not on-going; that is, if the EPI project was established only for the identification function. A primary disadvantage is that the dissemination may not be under the control of those persons responsible for the practice/program identification.

Update Materials. The practice of revising materials to maintain their currency and accuracy is especially advantageous for ongoing projects. When dissemination material becomes outdated, its value is greatly diminished. The existence of outdated materials diminishes the value of current materials as well. Updating materials requires a systematic method for collecting and distributing revisions. The costs of the process must be weighed against the increased credibility that is gained.

An important understanding, not often clear to many who engage in EPI, is that dissemination is a limited mechanism for change. It can initiate important changes but several further steps are required for meaningful assimilation of the new ideas. These further steps are discussed under the next major step of the EPI process, Replication System (p. 52).

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

The dissemination step is closely tied to the purpose of the project. The purpose will guide the decisions regarding to whom and how the information is sent out. Material for what is sent was gathered through the prior documentation and information steps. Dissemination is only the first step in any replication effort.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DECISION

What type of dissemination effort does the project purpose suggest?

What type of dissemination effort do the project funds allow?

What existing networks, conferences, newsletters, and technical assistance networks could be utilized?

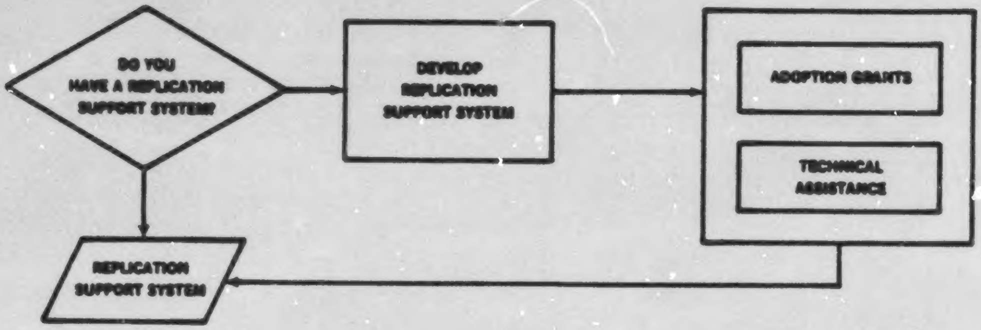
Is the EPI and dissemination a one-time or ongoing process?

OUTCOME

A dissemination plan includes:

- a description of mechanisms for disseminating information;
- strategies for utilizing mechanisms including timelines, staff, and resource allocations; and
- methods for updating materials if the process is ongoing.

I. REPLICATION SYSTEM


DO YOU HAVE A REPLICATION SUPPORT SYSTEM?
DEVELOP REPLICATION SUPPORT SYSTEM
ADOPTION GRANTS
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
REPLICATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

A Replication Support System is the set of procedures the EPI project establishes to assist new sites in the adoption of effective practices/programs that have been identified.

Adoption Grants provide monetary assistance to sites wishing to implement an identified practice/program.

Technical Assistance provides consultative services to a site wishing to implement an identified effective practice/program on how to proceed with the implementation. Consultation may take a variety of forms: providing information, linking potential adopters with developers, consulting during the planning stage, arranging for program visitation, or "walking" the adapters through the steps of the implementation process.

OVERVIEW

If the purpose of the EPI project includes replication, or demonstrated change for improvement, further effort is still required. Change does not just happen. It needs to be planned and supported. Recent literature regarding educational change (Fullan, 1982) emphasizes:

- The individuals or groups who will be developing and implementing the change must find meaning concerning what should change as well as how to go about it. They will need to grapple with who benefits from the change and how sound or feasible is the idea and approach.

  Although difficult and complex to answer, these questions are critical if the group's decisions are to lead to real, not symbolic, change. (Also of note is that deciding not to replicate a project might be important to a particular district's progress at a particular time.)

- The change process is multidimensional for it involves the possible use of new or revised materials, the possible use of new teaching approaches, and the possible alteration of beliefs. It also requires attention to several factors simultaneously, such as leadership, staff development, acquiring needed resources, and monitoring. Its success relies on the educated commitment of not only the teacher, but also the principal, district office, community, parents, and students, each of whom have different needs, priorities, apprehensions, and expectations.

- Change is not an event, but a process. Fullan (1982) suggests that it includes these four phases: initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome. The process takes time; significant change requires a minimum of two to three years.

- Staff development can be defined broadly to include everything from the informal interaction of teachers to formal workshops. Teachers learn best from each other in face-to-face interaction. Frequent, open interaction across roles is also critical to the success of the project (e.g., teacher with principal, principal with district office, teacher with student, etc.). Educational change often amounts to resocialization. Such change cannot happen without much discussion, especially in the initiation stage when "if," "what," and "how" are the concern and in implementation when the trials and errors necessitate redefinition and support. Staff development needs to be sustained throughout all phases of the project and needs to include learning by doing, concrete role models, and meeting with resource consultants and fellow implementers.

- The leaders who are guiding the project must have some degree of expertise in the content area of the project, must be skilled in interpersonal communication, and must possess the conceptual and technical skills pertaining to the planning and implementation of change.

- Projects which continue are not dependent on outside funds. Staff and administration turnover is one of the greatest barriers to continuation. Plans can be designed, however, to minimize the harm done by turnover.

- Evaluation of the project should be on-going. Formative evaluation to determine whether the practice/program was implemented as planned should be conducted via actual observation rather than questionnaires.

- Change is a people process. The people involved will need a sense that the project will work. They will need the strength and willingness to support each other when the going is rough, and the wisdom to celebrate each accomplishment along the way. Change is what people do and think. It is not just reading a nicely bound compendia of effective practices or attending an interesting conference.

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An immediate issue arising for the EPI project staff from these findings from the innovation and change research is that of determining who should receive support in replicating or adapting the identified effective practices. Who will be a good investment of the EPI project's resources? Who is ready for change and the intense human interaction it requires? To assist in working out responses to these questions, some of the issues and questions raised in the nomination, selection, and criteria steps of the EPI process may be rewritten to apply to the Effective Practice Adoption process.

Once the target group has been redefined, the next consideration will be what type of help they will need. Since change is a people process, the best way to deal with this unknown will be to question each recipient or a sample of them. If their need is for technical assistance, make sure that the consultants who are made available know enough about the content area of the practice, are skilled in interpersonal relationships, and are knowledgeable and experienced in change agentry. If the request is for funds, give only enough to get the project started and securely on its way, keeping in mind that there must be local financial support if the project is to survive.

Issues relevant to the provision of adoption grants or technical assistance are considerable:

Adoption Grants provide an incentive for sites to adopt an effective practice/program. They assist sites in the start-up cost necessary to adopt new materials and train staff. Grants may be modest, and yet be effective. In fact, funding probably should require substantial cost sharing since it has been found (Fullan, 1982) that practices/programs have greater continuity when school districts invest their own funds.

Technical Assistance. There are several decisions the Technical Assistant will need to address: how to select those who are ready for help vs. those who are not; whether to provide appropriate service to a few vs. minimal service to many; how to provide help the adapter really needs vs. help the technical assistant thinks the adapter needs. To aid in the first decision, of determining the readiness level for assistance, the technical assistant may want to develop a checklist of characteristics the potential adapter would evidence if considered a good candidate for help (e.g., some form of needs assessment conducted in the district; willingness to commit time). With regard to the second decision, the technical assistant may find a training of trainers a cost saving strategy. These are trainings in which representatives from several districts are all instructed at the same time in the implementation of the practice/program. The trained representatives return to their districts to duplicate the training there. Another method for spreading technical assistance further is to hold a conference at which developers explain their effective practices/programs and are available for consultation. The ability to make the third decision, regarding the help the client really needs, requires good interviewing and listening skills. Helping all the personnel who will be involved to clarify what changing to the new practice/program will mean for them is a critical task. Care must be taken that the adopters "own" their new practice/program.

Stretching the EPI project's funds for replication will be important. Some ideas that might prove cost-effective are to utilize existing technical assistance networks (e.g., in California, the Special Education Resource Network), to request matching funds, or to fund teleconferences between adapters and developers.

Mechanisms for collecting informative evaluation data will need to be designed and implemented in order to determine a possible need for correction of the support system and to identify areas of real change and thus a successful EPI and adoption component.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DECISION STEPS

The replication step is closely tied to the purpose of the project. Projects interested in adoption/service improvement will be concerned with the availability of replication support systems to assist in the adoption process. EPI projects which consider replication a major purpose will be concerned with establishing mechanisms to complement a support system early in the project. If the development of criteria and the information/documentation processes were conducted well, the EPI staff will be working with effective practices/programs that are replicable and will have ample information to facilitate adoption. Replication also has a close relationship to the dissemination step since it is dissemination that begins the initial replication phase.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DECISION

Who should receive support to replicate the identified effective practices/ programs?

What type of support do the adopters need?

If the adopters need technical assistance are there persons available knowledgeable about the process of change and the effective program/practice to provide this service

If the adopters need additional funding how can the EPI project's funds be maximized?

Is there a method for evaluating the replication support system?

OUTCOME

A replication support system includes:

- a clear definition of who may be recipients of support;

- a description of the method to be used to determine the type of support the adapter needs;
- specification of the type and amount of assistance that may be received;
- specification of the type of evidence the adapter must submit to show commitment to implementing and maintaining the new program/practice; and
- evidence that the support system staff are dedicated to assisting adapters make the intended changes.

IV. EXAMPLES

In this section, two extended examples are given of educational agencies engaging in EPI projects. The first example takes the perspective of a state education agency (SEA) that engages in an EPI project for the purpose of information dissemination. In the second example, a local education agency (LEA) engages in an EPI project for the purpose of adoption/service improvement. In both of these examples each step of the EPI process relevant to the respective project is described in some detail. The steps follow the order in which they have been presented in Section Three. These two examples allow the reader to see how the process would work in a realistic setting. The first example that is described is based on an actual EPI project. The second example is hypothetical. This hypothetical example was selected to show how an LEA might use the EPI process to improve educational practice.

A. STATE EDUCATION AGENCY: DISSEMINATION PURPOSE

Purpose: Information Dissemination

Through a needs assessment process conducted by Regional Resource Center West (RRCW) in 1980, the California State Department of Education, Office of Special Education (OSE) identified a need to improve career/vocational assessment practices for handicapped students. Upon analysis of the need and consideration of possible strategies for addressing it, OSE recognized that some local school districts had developed effective solutions. OSE hypothesized that other districts might get ideas for adapting/adopting these practices if they only had a way of knowing about them. Use of an Effective Practice Identification (EPI) approach seemed a natural one to take. The outcome would be a document that would summarize the problems associated with performing career/vocational assessments and also would describe effective practices. The document would be distributed to school districts throughout the state. Human and fiscal resources to conduct such a project were available through OSE and RRCW.

Issues: Identified by Review of Literature and Interviews

Realizing the importance of clearly defining the need or problem area, and barriers to its solution, the EPI staff (members of OSE and RRCW staffs) began with a review of the literature available through the RRCW library. The library included recent journals, books, and other materials related to vocational education for handicapped individuals. This review generated lists of related issues, further printed resources to pursue, and names of experts to call. Additional titles of materials and names of key people (e.g., university faculty, state education and vocational rehabilitation personnel) were obtained from the OSE consultant who specialized in career/vocational education for handicapped students. The EPI staff developed an informal interview protocol, called 10 experts nationally, and asked for their perceptions of the important issues surrounding career/vocational assessment in special education. The more reading, interviewing, and discussing the EPI staff did, the more repetitious some of the information and concerns became until three subissues began to emerge:

- What appropriate assessment instruments and procedures are available?
- What kind of expertise is required by an examiner to conduct a career/vocational assessment?
- How can the requisite expertise be obtained?
- How can staffs of special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation personnel coordinate their efforts to maximize the benefits of their services to the handicapped individual?

Clarification and verification of these issues continued throughout the project. With each site visited, the issues took on new or more detailed meaning. However, the three issues initially delineated turned out to represent some of the most pressing problems in the field.

Nominations: Gathered through Review of the Literature, Interviews, and Surveys

During the review of literature and interviews conducted for the issue delineation phase, a list was started of potential sites with effective practices/programs. This list was augmented through the use of a national survey conducted by the twelve RRCs. As a federally funded program the RRCs needed to publicize their EPI projects broadly so that any school district would have an opportunity to be nominated. Brochures explaining the project and soliciting nominations were sent to all state departments of education, selected consumer representatives, related national organizations, and other knowledgeable persons. Persons responding to the call for nominations were asked for general information about the sites they were nominating and the ways in which the sites addressed the issues that had been delineated. Nominations were accepted until the final weeks of the project. As the project progressed the EPI staff became increasingly adept, through pointed interviewing, at recognizing potential effective practice/program sites that addressed the issues of interest. Increased familiarity with the issues assisted the EPI staff in clarifying the type of practice/program they were interested in considering.

Selection: Conducted by Evaluation

Selection of the sites to be visited and to be documented was made by a panel of four RRCW staff members--the person in charge of the budget and accountability of the project; a person knowledgeable about special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation; and two people familiar with the process of EPI. There were three iterations of the selection process. In the first the panel reviewed the information available on the practice/program (i.e., notes from the interview of the nominator and any materials received from or about the program) and applied their selection criteria (enumerated in the next section) to screen the sites and select those to visit and/or document. The panel members were experienced in working with each other and thus were able to effectively use a consensus decision-making process. Discussions continued until consensus was reached on each of the twenty sites that had been nominated. Programs passing the initial screening were contacted and the staff were interviewed by phone. In the second iteration the interview information was reviewed by the panel and through the use of the same criteria as before, the panel made a determination either to drop the program, document it using the information already received, or visit the site for additional information. A third iteration of the selection process was conducted for those sites that had been visited. Following the visit, the panel reconvened to determine whether or not the site continued to meet their criteria and should be included in the document that would be compiled and disseminated throughout the state. Records were kept on why each program was accepted or eliminated.

Selection Criteria: Addresses the Problem, Demographics, Effectiveness Data, Meets Federal and State Laws and Regulations, Replicability, Resources Required, Type of Service, Uniqueness, Variety of Service, and Willingness to Participate

The selection criteria used in this project were related to the project's purpose, the issues being addressed, the constraints of the project's funding agencies, and the effectiveness of the practice/program. The criteria were used in the following way: First, if the program did not meet federal or state laws and regulations, was unwilling to participate, did not address the career/vocational assessment issues that had been identified, or would cost too much to document, the program was immediately dropped from consideration. The second-order criteria used were effectiveness data (both quantitative and qualitative), replicability, uniqueness, type of service (e.g., an example of a successful interagency effort was sought), and variety of service (to enable the documentation of more than one practice to occur at one site and thus lower documentation costs). Those criteria carried equal weight at the beginning of the project; however, midway through the project, type of service took on increased importance (and therefore was weighted more heavily) since a broad representation of effective career/vocational assessment practices was desired. "Variety of Service" also took on greater importance as the project dollars began to dwindle.

Documentation: Conducted through Review of Program Materials, Site Visits, and Site Validation

Since a thorough and consistent documentation was desired across project sites, visitations by EPI teams were used. Prior to the visit the team members were trained in interviewing techniques. They then reviewed any materials they had from the site and developed an unstructured interview protocol. The site contact person was called and appointment times and locations were determined. Care was taken to set up as many separate or group appointments as needed in order to gain a comprehensive description based on varied perspectives. The interviewing teams were usually composed of two EPI staff. Occasionally, because of time limitations, only one EPI member would go to the site. The visits lasted from one to two days. Depending on the site, administrators, teachers, other agency personnel, students, and parents were interviewed. While one team member asked questions, the other took notes. Immediately following the interview the team reviewed their notes for accuracy and thoroughness. Back home, the team members converted their notes to a summary form. This was the format that would be used in the final document. They phoned the site to ask them to fill in any gaps in their information. They also asked the site contact person to review and correct the completed practice summary form. The team made certain that letters were sent to each of the sites visited thanking the staff for their time and hospitality.

Information: Collected on Background of the Problem, Contact Person, Demographic Data, Effectiveness Data, Funding Sources, Implementation Steps, Practice/Program Description, Program Products/ Materials, Recommendations for Replication, Resources Required, and Suggestions for Improvement

Categories of information were selected according to the anticipated needs of the local school district personnel who would read the completed document. "Background of the Problem," "Demographic Data," "Practice/Program Description," and "Program Products/ Materials" would provide a basic overview for the reader. "Effectiveness Data," quantitative and qualitative, would inform the inquiring district of the practices'/programs' outcomes and impact. "Implementation Steps," "Resources Required," "Funding Sources," and "Suggestions for Improvement" would provide information to be used in deciding whether or not to adopt (or adapt) the practice/program and how to go about it. The contact person's input could also be helpful in these decisions.

Dissemination: Conducted through Computer Descriptions, Document, Network, and Presentations

Multiple strategies were used to disseminate the information collected. The main strategy was to produce a document which contained a discussion of the issues and a summary of each of the practices and programs identified. The format of the document and the type and amount of information to include in it were decided based on the intended audience for the document: the busy local school administrator. OSE disseminated 2,000 copies of the document to key personnel throughout the state (i.e., State Board members, superintendents of districts with high schools, directors of Special Education Local Plan Areas, and vocational education directors). The issues section and the practice/program descriptions were also disseminated to the other 11 RRCs in order that they might use the information in their work with state offices of special education. The site summaries were also placed on Vocational and Occupational Information in Career Education (VOICE), a California data base used by vocational educators. Further, the material was presented at a session of a regional vocational education conference as well as an RRC West multi-state conference.

B. LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY: ADOPTION PURPOSE*

Purposes: Adoption/Service Improvement

Mr. Davis, Lead School Psychologist in Centerville Unified School District, and his staff of school psychologists were concerned with the numerous inappropriate referrals by classroom teachers of nonhandicapped students who were below average academically and/or who were discipline problems. Davis had read about several districts and talked with acquaintances who had alleviated a similar problem through the use of Student Study Teams. Davis decided to investigate the feasibility of this solution for his own district's referral problem and if it proved viable to adopt a similar approach. His purpose, and later that of his district's, was adoption/service improvement.

Issues: Interviews and Review of Literature

Davis prepared a list of questions to use in informal interviews with selected principals, teachers, resource teachers, and school psychologists in his own district. He wanted to find out how they viewed the district's over-referral problem and what issues they saw related to it. He made another list of questions for colleagues outside of the district who were either struggling with over-referral, too, or who seemed to have overcome the problem. He also interviewed his district's state consultant of special education regarding her understanding of the problem. Davis had a literature search conducted through his district's computer data base membership for information on over-referral of special needs students, grades K-12, and on student or child study teams. He had time to review only those materials which seemed especially pertinent. Through the interviews and reading, Davis delineated the following issues as related to the broader one of "How can we prevent the over-referral of students to special education?"

- How can we help regular education teachers develop the skills for teaching slow learners and children with behavior disorders who do not qualify for special education?
- How can we help regular education teachers develop a sense of "ownership" for slow learners and those with behavior problems?
- What are the features of the referral process that control for over-referral?

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*The example which follows is fictitious. As might be expected, our search of the literature did not produce a write-up of a local district's use of the Effective Practice Identification (EPI) approach. Although school districts do make use of some or all EPI steps when attempting to locate innovative practices/programs to meet their district needs, they do not typically have the resources or need to document their processes and publish them. This example was designed to illustrate the steps a school district might take as it used the EPI decision-making model. The example is based on a combination of personal experience and conversations with LEA personnel.

- What support systems are required by regular education teachers in order to effectively instruct nonhandicapped students who have special needs?

The delineation of the issues gave Davis material for more clearly defining his purpose and gave him data to substantiate the appropriateness of using an EPI approach. Through his interviews and reading he had become more and more convinced that the solution for his district's over-referral problems had already been created and tested. What he and his district needed to do was identify those sites with practices/programs which directly related to Centerville's needs. With the assistance of his Director of Pupil Services, Davis prepared a proposal for his Assistant Superintendent, defining the problem and requesting released time and mileage for a team composed of a teacher, principal, and himself to identify and visit effective program sites. The Associate Superintendent and Board approved this plan, allowing for three visits within the greater metropolitan area. There were several promising sites within the area; therefore, the travel restriction would not affect the success of the project. Pending the team's report on the visits, the Board would consider approval of additional funds for adoption/adaptation of the program(s).

Nominations: Gathered Through Review of the Literature and Interviews

During the process of delineating the issues related to the problem of over-referral of nonhandicapped students, Davis had already begun a list of potential sites to contact. The teacher and principal on his team added the names of sites they were aware of that had solved the over-referral problem. All three made additional calls to colleagues, explaining the nature of their over-referral problem, and requesting the names of sites that had specific programs for reducing inappropriate referrals. They mentioned their interest in student study teams as a promising method. The principal and teacher attended a regional Council for Exceptional Children conference in which there was a presentation by another school district that used a student study team approach. They interviewed the presenters. Davis called the regional California Center for Educational Improvement and the regional Special Education Resource Network for additional ideas. The team kept notes on each of the sites that they learned about. Ten different programs were located; three of these had been recommended repeatedly by their sources. At this point Davis, the principal, and the teacher felt they had enough practices/programs from which to choose.

Selection: Conducted by Evaluation

Davis, the principal, and the teacher had been given authority by the Board to select the sites they would visit. Together they reviewed the notes they had on each of the nominated sites. If their notes were not complete enough to judge the site on each criterion, one of them made a call to the site for additional information. Through a concensus decision making process they determined whether to (1) eliminate the site from consideration, (2) write or call for particular information from the site, or (3) visit the site.

Selection Criteria: Addresses the Problem, Demographics, Effectiveness Data, Meets Federal and State Laws and Regulations, Replicability, Type of Service, Willingness to Participate

In the first iteration of their selection process the team screened each of the nominations to make certain that each addressed at least one of Centerville's subissues, served a client group similar to Centerville's, had qualitative and quantitative effectiveness data, was in compliance with federal and state laws and regulations, appeared to be replicable in Centerville, and would agree to a site visit and/or sending materials. Two nominations did not pass this screening process and were eliminated. The remaining eight were checked for location; only five were within Centerville's metropolitan area. The three that were out of the general area were later called, interviewed by phone, and asked to send information. The remaining five were then ranked in terms of how directly and completely they addressed Centerville's problem and how replicable their program appeared to be for the Centerville district. The team wanted to visit at least one site that employed a student study team method ("type of service"). As things turned out two of their three top-ranked nominations used student study teams. The fourth and fifth ranked programs were later called, interviewed, and asked to send information. A final iteration of the selection process was conducted after the eight selected sites had been interviewed. At this point "addresses the problem" and "replicability" were the criteria used in determining which practices/programs would be included in their report.

Documentation: Conducted through Review of Program Materials, Review of Evaluation Data, and Site Visits

Davis and his project team needed to document the procedures in the sites they had selected in order to (1) verify that the practices/programs met their criteria, (2) gather the information they needed to adopt/adapt the practices/programs in Centerville, and (3) collect effectiveness data that would convince the Board to support the adoption of a new practice/program in Centerville. At the two sites with student study teams they asked to visit an actual student study team session and following the session to interview the team and the presenting teacher. Both districts were very obliging. Their third site had a carefully defined referral process but no student study team. Davis and his group asked to visit with a school psychologist, principal, and teacher recommended by the district as knowledgeable about the process. For each of the sites that they were unable to visit Davis called and interviewed by phone the project director or a principal. Davis completed all the information in a report to the Board.

Information: Collected on Contact Person; Effectiveness Data; Funding Sources; Implementation Steps; Program or Practice Description; Products/ Materials; Recommendations for Replication; Resources Required, Suggestions for Improvement

A Program Summary Form was developed and used as a guide while conducting the interviews and later as the format for presenting the information collected. The form began with the name, address, and phone number of the school district and the name of the contact person. A place for a description of the program followed. Next came a section for effectiveness data (qualitative and quantitative), implementation steps, recommendations for replication, suggestions for improvement, resources required, funding sources, and available products and materials. Any information that Davis and his group already had on the program was filled in before the interview.

Dissemination: Conducted through Document and Presentation

Davis, the principal, and teacher on the team submitted their report to the Board via the Director of Pupil Services and Associate Superintendent. Their report included a description of the steps they had taken and a summary of the information they had collected. It concluded with the following recommendations: (1) that Davis, the principal, and the teacher be given an additional two days released time to combine their material with a packaged training on student study teams available through the Special Education Resource Network, (2) that they present an overview of their findings and describe the training at the principal's monthly meeting, (3) that any principal desiring to develop the student study team concept volunteer a team of four from his/her school (the principal, a teacher, the resource teacher, and the school psychologist assigned to the school), (4) that five pilot schools be selected by the Associate Superintendent, Director of Pupil Services, and Davis as ones most likely to follow-through after the training, (5) that the teams be released for the two-day training, (6) that simple evaluation data be collected on the effectiveness of the new student study teams (methods for such evaluation had been found in their interviews), and (7) that pending the success of the pilot schools, the district adopt a policy and budget funds necessary to support the operation of student study teams. The Board accepted the recommendations of Davis and his group. Davis, the principal, and the teacher prepared for the principals' meeting and disseminated their information there.

Adoption: Through Technical Assistance

The adoption plans designed during the Dissemination Step were implemented. Davis, the principal, and the teacher conducted the two-day training. Afterwards they responded on an as-needed basis to questions from the pilot schools. From time to time they referred the questions to the contacts they had made during their site interviews. Davis's secretary collected the evaluation data (e.g., number of referrals pre and post training; number of parent complaints, tabulation of responses to the training, and a follow-up questionnaire). Davis summarized these activities and results for the Board. The Board voted to expand the program.

V. APPENDICES

A. AN INQUIRY INTO THE METHODOLOGY USED FOR IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICATION

INTRODUCTION

Effective practice identification (EPI) as used in this study refers to a type of field-based research concerned with the identification of educational programs or practices (i.e., segments of programs) that are considered to be of high quality. EPI shares many of the constraints and resultant difficulties of other methods of applied research. In addition, EPI is primarily a type of research conducted by practitioners who typically have expertise in teaching subjects such as special education, reading, or vocational education, for example, rather than in research methodology.

The identification and documentation of effective practices and programs has become widespread in the past decade. Federal mandates for EPI include the development of the National Diffusion Network, with its Joint Dissemination Review Panel, which are charged jointly with identifying and disseminating exemplary programs in education; and the Technical Assistance and Development System which provides technical assistance to the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program and includes a mandated mechanism for disseminating effective practice information. Additionally, numerous EPI projects have received federal funding (e.g., those conducted by the American Institute of Research, Applied Management Sciences, and the Regional Resource Centers). States also have implemented EPI projects. One study (Reed, et al, 1981) in surveying the states, noted that 45 states have established some procedure for validating promising practices in education. Local sites have become involved in EPI in part because of the federal and state impetus.

Numerous benefits of EPI can be identified which may account for its widespread use. Primary among these is the belief that effective practices are a credible source of innovations demonstrating methods that have worked for other educators (Applied Management Sciences, 1980). EPI functions to commend those who do exemplary work and is valuable for public relations. The process can be valuable for developers and adopters alike, clarifying needs and identifying solutions for existing problems. Finally, the present financial situation encourages local developers to seek additional funding by participating in EPI projects.

Little information on methodological procedures for EPI exists. This compounds the difficulties faced by those involved in the development/documentation/dissemination/adoption process--most of whom lack the needed expertise. As with most field-based research, EPI is complex without clearly defined steps or decision rules.

The purpose of this study is to examine, analyze, and evaluate present methodology used in identifying and documenting effective practices. The information obtained through the study subsequently will provide the basis for a how-to-guide for practitioners involved in the identification of effective practices.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in the conduct of this study was tailored specifically to the nature of the problem. In order to analyze the various methods employed by projects in the course of identifying and describing effective programs and practices (and sometimes encouraging their replication), a substantial knowledge of a sufficient number of EPI projects was needed. This knowledge was obtained through a variety of methods which are described below. The data for this study constituted written descriptions of EPI projects supplemented by telephone conversations with their authors when additional information about the method was required. The 25 EPI projects selected for this study were coded according to how they conducted the various steps in the EPI process (e.g., delineate issues, develop selection criteria, etc.). The major steps had been identified by the principle investigators in their previous work in the field and then revised during the coding process for this study. The results of the coded documents were tabulated and relationships were analyzed. What follows is a full description of the study including results and conclusions.

Data Collection. EPI project descriptions and related literature were obtained from a variety of sources. Initially, documents available through the Regional Resource Center West library were obtained.[1] A computer search of ERIC was conducted. Also, five experts were interviewed to obtain recommendations of relevant projects and materials. Of the 427 titles identified, 25 represented unduplicated[2] EPI projects which eventually were coded and analyzed. Another 31 documents represented literature on related topics such as innovation and change. These materials were read and annotated to provide additional perspectives and depth to the processes outlined in the EPI project materials.

Interviews. Concurrent with initial data collection efforts, five persons experienced in EPI were interviewed by telephone. These five experts were selected because of their work on major effective practice studies. These interviews had a threefold purpose: (1) to identify EPI projects and materials for inclusion in the study; (2) to obtain detailed information on the EPI projects that each of the experts had been involved in, including information on project scope, purposes, outcomes, and factors influencing methodological decisions; and (3) to learn the experts' perceptions of the benefits and constraints of EPI and principles for conducting EPI projects. Interviewees were selected based on the investigators' knowledge of the interviewees previous work in the EPI area, either through personal contact, review of materials, or the recommendations of others. Interviewees were contacted in writing regarding the purpose of the interview and the general information desired. The interview was scheduled by phone. All experts contacted participated in the interviews. A structured interview protocol was developed and used in the interviews, which lasted approximately one hour for each. Information provided resulted in an expansion of the categories used in coding EPI projects and an expansion of the list of projects to review. Most importantly, the interviews provided detailed information regarding specific projects, the factors influencing various methodological decisions within these projects, and insights into the issues surrounding the EPI process which were later incorporated into the guide for practitioners.

Coding Effective Practice Documents. A preliminary coding form, submitted in the initial study proposal, was developed based on the investigators' knowledge of elements to consider in the identification, selection, documentation, and dissemination processes. Initial coding of the documents utilized this form. Coding was done by placing a checkmark by the appropriate category if an element was evident in the methods described in an EPI document. Elements not included on the coding form were written in beside "other" for each category. Initially, each investigator coded the same document. The codings were compared for consistency. Discrepancies were discussed, definitions of the categories were clarified, and the coding form was expanded to include additional elements. A second document was then coded by all three investigators. Again the codings were compared, resulting in modifications in the coding form and a refined and expanded list of definitions. Information provided by experts in the telephone interviews resulted in modifications on the coding form as well.

This revised, and much lengthened, coding form was used to establish reliability between investigators. Each investigator independently evaluated three EPI documents and a pairwise proportion of agreement was computed for each document. First, proportions were computed for each major section of the coding form (i.e., purpose, issue identification, nomination process, selection process, selection criteria, documentation procedures, information needed, dissemination strategy, replication support, and demographic information) and then, for the overall form. These pairwise comparisons were used to determine if any investigator differed significantly in the way she coded the documents. Additionally, proportion of agreement ratios were computed on the three investigators together for each section and the overall form. Finally, a proportion of agreement across sections and documents were computed for both the pairwise comparisons and for all three investigators together. These marginals provide summary information on the agreement between the investigators across documents.

Computation of the proportion of agreement used the following statistic:

$$\frac{\text{the number of elements in agreement}}{\text{the total number of elements}}$$

Each element was counted as a dichotomous item with a check indicating a "yes" response and a blank indicating a "no" response. Multiple elements in a given section could be checked. Each major section contained two or more subsections. Subsections could contain multiple elements. No weighting by subsection was computed. This procedure has the limitation that a discrepancy between subsections would have the same affect on the proportion of agreement as a discrepancy between elements within a subsection. This limitation should be kept in mind when reviewing the proportion of agreement data shown in Table 1. Despite this limitation, the small number of coding forms involved (nine) permitted direct analysis of the data; thus, the development of interrater agreement was not dependent on the quantitative data alone.

Examination of the proportion of agreement data in Table 1 indicates that the overall proportions between each pair of investigators on all documents ranged from .81 to .93; and that the overall proportions of agreement among all three investigators ranged from .76 to .86. These results met the prerequisite minimum of .75 set prior to the computation of the proportion of agreement.

Table 1. Proportion of agreement.

Section	Document 1				Document 2				Document 3				Average Proportion of Agreement Section	
	I1&I2	I1&I3	I2&I3	I1I2I3	I1&I2	I1&I3	I2&I3	I1I2I3	I1&I2	I1&I3	I2&I3	I1I2I3	Pairwise	All Three
Purpose	.86	.86	1.00	.86	.86	.86	.72	.71	.86	1.00	.86	.71	.87	.76
Issue Identification	.90	.95	.95	.86	.90	1.00	.90	.91	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	.95	.92
Nomination Process	.93	.87	.80	.73	.80	.53	.73	.53	.93	1.00	.93	.87	.84	.71
Selection Process	.83	.83	1.00	.83	.83	.75	.75	.75	.50	.67	.67	.58	.70	.69
Selection Criteria	.94	.65	.71	.53	.88	.71	.71	.65	.94	1.00	1.00	.94	.83	.71
Documentation Process	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	.89	1.00	.89	.89	.89	.89	1.00	.89	.95	.93
Information Sought	.88	.38	.38	.38	.81	.75	.81	.69	.81	.69	.75	.63	.69	.56
Demographic Information	1.00	.92	.92	.92	.85	.77	.92	.77	.92	.92	1.00	.92	.91	.87
Dissemination Strategy	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Replication Support	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Overall Proportion of Agreement for Document	.83	.81	.83	.77	.87	.81	.85	.76	.89	.91	.91	.86	.87	.79

In examining the proportions for each section, it is meaningful to look at the average proportions. It is apparent that two sections, selection process and information sought, fell well below the desired level of agreement. Difficulties with the selection process section can be attributed to problems encountered in Document 3. Discussion among the investigators isolated the problem; a method not clearly covered by any one element was dealt with differently by each investigator. Difficulties with the information sought section was attributable to problems with a single document also. In this instance, Document 1 presented specific difficulties since it utilized two reporting formats that differed significantly. Investigators were unclear whether to collapse the categories, ignore one category, or to analyze them as two separate methods. Different responses to the dilemma led to lowered proportions. Investigators agreed that had independence not been a goal, each would have brought the difficulty to the group's attention for a joint decision.

Discussion of the difficulties encountered in coding the three documents resulted in the following actions to assure interrater agreement throughout the coding process: (1) definitions were clarified and refined; (2) elements were added to the coding form; (3) descriptive information was noted for all elements not clearly equivalent to the category definition; and (4) periodic meetings were held to discuss difficult items and to reach consensus on these items. These practices provided consistency between investigators in the coding process. Consequently, each additional document was coded by a single investigator. The final coding categories are indicated in Table 2 along with the results of the coding process.

Data Analysis. The individually coded data sheets were summarized in matrix form. Marginal totals for each process element were summed and the percentage of projects containing each element was computed. Relationships within each decision phase and between the phases were examined. The result of these analyses is reported below.

The study results were then integrated with relevant recommendations from the literature and from the interviews with experts and a comprehensive model of the EPI process was developed. Each phase of the EPI process that was described by the EPI projects reviewed was included in the model. Elements described in the projects reviewed were evaluated in terms of their frequency of use, their conceptual clarity, and their support in the related literature. The various phases and elements encountered in the study were then incorporated in the general model. This model became the basis of a how-to-guide for practitioners and, essentially, represents a survey of the various EPI strategies used in the projects studied.

A draft of the how-to-guide was initially reviewed by five persons selected by the investigators. Three of the five reviewers were selected because of their previous experience in conducting EPI projects. These experts were associated with agencies providing technical assistance to special educators: two at the national level and one at the state level. Additionally, two persons less familiar with EPI projects were selected: one with a state education agency perspective and the other with a local perspective. Reviewers were asked to focus on the guide's accuracy, thoroughness, clarity, and organization. Responses were generally favorable with the major recommendation for revision related to the format. It was suggested that the process elements be integrated into the description of the decision steps rather than treated separately. This revision was made. Thus, the final version of the guide contains a flowchart of the EPI process with related narrative organized according to the decision steps. A review of the completed document was conducted by three consultants of the California State Department of Education, Office of Special Education to ensure that the document met proposal specifications.

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Table 2. A matrix of coded EPI projects.

EPI PROJECTS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	Total	Percentage
Purposes																										25	100
Adoption/Service Improvement																					X					1	4
Development										X																1	4
Dissemination		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X				X	X	X	X		X	17	68
Replication	X						X			X							X			X	X			X		7	28
Research				X	X	X						X		X	X			X	X				X			9	36
Training																										0	0
Issue Delineation																										19	76
Conferences																										1	4
Participants						EPC																					
Interviews																							X			5	20
Degree of Structure				U				U																			
Mode				P		P		PT																			
Respondents				P	P	E		EP																			
Legislative Initiative						X	X									X	X						X		X	6	24
Review of Literature			X		X	X		X			X			X		X		X								8	32
Site Visits																							X			2	11
Interviews				X																							
Observations				X																							
Surveys																										0	
Respondents																											
Other										X		X	X	X	X				X		X	X				8	32
Nomination Process (# p/p nominated)				(25)											(394)											25	100
Funded Programs		X															X					X			X	4	16
Interviews			1,2									X		X			X						2		X	13	52
Complexity of Information			[illegible]		N	D			I						I								I				
Degree of Structure			U	U					U			M		M								U	U				
Mode			T	P		T			T			T										T	T				
Respondents			EPC	CEP		P			CEP			P		P	P		E		P			E	E		EP		
Review of Literature			1													1										2	8
Surveys			1													2							1	X	X	18	72
Complexity of Information			I			I	ND	I		D			I		I	SD		I	I	D	D			I			
Respondents	P		EC		CEP	EPC	P	E		P	P		P		E			P		P	EP		E	E	EP		
Other								X																		1	4
Selection Process (# of iterations)			(3)			(2)	(2)			(2)		(1)				(2)	(2)				(3)	(1)	(4)	(4)	(1)	25	100
Selection by Evaluation																										22	88
Decision Process																											
Group Consensus						2	2	2	2	1,2					3			X			2			X		9	22
Individual Judgement								1	1						1,2											3	12
Other																		X								1	4
Evaluators			1,2														1										
Agency Representatives	X	X		X				X	X	1,2		X		X	1,3	1,2		X		X	1-3				X	14	56
Consumers			3							1,2							2									3	12
Experts										1,2						1		X		X				X		5	20
Practitioners							2			1,2								X	X							4	16
Method																											
Conduct Site Visits			3			2				2						2	X						4	3,4		7	28
Review Evaluation Data			2						X	2		X			X						2,3			4		7	28
Review Materials			1,2						X	2				X		1	X							1,2,4		7	28
Review Nomination Data			1			1,2			X	1,2		X						X		X	1-3	X			X	10	40
Other							2	X						X				X					1,2,3			5	20
Self-Selection					X		1				X		X													4	16

(Continued)

Table 2 (Cont'd.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	Total	Percentage
Selection Criteria (#p/p selected)				(16)					(89)						(257)											24	96
Address the Problem	X		2	X		1	X	X		1,2	X				X	X	X		X		1,2					13	52
Assurance of Continuance	X						X				X				X						3	X				6	24
Client Group Served					X				X							X							1		X	5	20
Community Support	X						X						1													3	12
Cost	X							X		1,2										X	2,3					5	20
Descriptive Information	X									1,2					X		X			X	2,3					6	24
Effectiveness Data														X		X										2	18
Qualitative	X			X		1	X	X	X		X						X				2,3		X			10	40
Quantitative	X		X							2					X	X				X	2,3					7	28
Geographic Location			2			2										X	X				2		2			6	24
Local Financial Support							X	X													3					3	12
Meets Federal and State Laws and Regulations	X		2																		1,3		1			5	15
Number of Years in Progress					X									X			X									3	12
Replicability	X		2,3					X		2				X	X					X	2,3					8	32
Type of Service					X	1,2									X	X		X		X			2		X	8	32
Uniqueness		X	2				X	X		1,2							X	X			3	X				9	36
Variety of Service		X	2	X	X	2																				5	20
Willingness to Participate			2							2											3					3	12
Other			2			2				2	X		X	X	X			X							X	9	36
Documentation Procedures																										25	100
First-hand Knowledge							X			X	X								X	X						5	20
Program Description					X					X			X			X		X			X				X	7	28
Review Evaluation Data										X					X						X					3	12
Review Program Materials		X	X							X				1	X		X			X		X				8	32
Site Validation of Documentation			X	X		X				X							X	X		X		X				8	32
Site Visit	X		X	X		X		X	X	X		X		2	X		X	X		X			X	X		15	60
Composition of Team	A		A	A				A	AP	A,E P,C				A	A								A	E,A			
Number on Team	3		1,2	2				1		5				2	2								1				
Other						T				X				T3	X							T				5	20
Information Needed (# of p/p)			(7)									(20)		(8)	(7)	(33)								(75)	(33)	25	100
Background of the Problem	X		X	X	X	X		X		X			X				X		X	X			X			12	8
Client Group Served	X	X	X	X		X			X	X	X	X	X				X			X	X			X		14	56
Contact Person	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X		X	X			X	X				X			X	X	15	60
Cost			X				X	X	X	X		X			X	X				X					X	10	40
Demographic Data			X		X	X			X		X	X				X							X		X	9	36
Effectiveness Data	X		X																		X					3	12
Qualitative			X	X		X		X	X		X	X						X	X	X	X					11	44
Quantitative						X				X					X					X	X					5	20
Funding Sources	X		X		X	X			X							X				X			X	X	X	10	40
Implementation Steps	X		X	X				X		X					X			X								7	28
Practice Description		X	X		X	X	X					X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	18	72
Program Description		X	X		X	X		X		X		X		X		X				X		X	X	X	X	14	56
Products, Materials		X	X					X		X	X	X	X				X									8	32
Recommendations for Replication			X	X				X			X					X				X	X				X	8	32
Resources Required	X		X	X			X	X		X	X				X	X	X		X		X		X		X	14	56
Staffing			X	X					X	X		X			X	X			X	X			X		X	11	44
Suggestions for Improvement			X	X												X				X	X				X	6	24
Other				X			X	X			X				X	X				X					X	8	32
Dissemination Strategies																										22	88
Articles	X					X		X									X			X	X					6	24
Awards Ceremonies	X																									1	4
Computer Descriptions	X			X				X																		3	12
Conference/Education Fair	X					X				X			X						X		X					6	24
Document	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	22	88
Grants	X						X	X		X											X					5	20
Network															X		X				X					3	12
Presentations								X		X							X				X					4	16
Technical Assistance						X		X		X							X				X			X		6	24
Update Materials	X																X				X					3	12
Other					X																X					2	8

Table 2 (Cont'd.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	Total	Percentage
Replication Support																										6	24
Adoption Grants	X									X							X				X			X		5	20
Technical Assistance										X							X			X	X			X		5	20
Other																					X					1	4
Demographic Information																										24	96
Geographic																											
Rural	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X				X	X	X	X	X	18	72
Urban	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	19	76
Grade Level																											
Preschool		X	X		X		X			X						X					X			X		8	32
Elementary			X				X	X	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	15	60
Secondary (Jr. & Sr. High)	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	20	80
Post-Seconoary	X		X									X					X				X	X		X		7	28
Perspective																											
LEA																		X	X							2	8
SEA		X					X	X		X		X	X				X					X		X	X	10	40
National			X	X	X	X			X		X				X	X				X	X		X			11	44
Type of Practice																											
Compensatory									X	X						X					X			X		5	20
General Ed.	X									X								X	X		X			X		6	24
Inservice			X							X			X								X			X		5	20
Parent Training			X							X			X								X			X		5	20
Special Ed.	X		X	X	X		X	X		X		X	X				X				X		X	X		13	52
Vocational Ed.	X		X			X		X		X	X				X						X	X		X		10	40
Other	X									X										X	X				X	5	20

KEY

Respondents
A - agency representative
C - consumer
E - expert
P - practitioner

Degree of Structure
U - unstructured
S - structured
M - mixture

Complexity of Information
N - name of program
I - some information needed
D - detailed information

Mode of Response
P - in-person
T - telephone interviews

RESULTS

The study results summarize the data collected from the 25 EPI projects. This information is shown in chart form in Table 2 above.

Purpose. Six distinct purposes for conducting EPI projects were identified: adoption/service improvement, development, dissemination, replication, research, and training. Only those purposes explicitly stated and supported by the methods followed by a project were coded. All projects expressed at least one purpose; 36% of the projects identified dual purposes and another 4% of the projects indicated that three purposes guided their project. The most frequently identified purpose was dissemination with 68% of the projects stating dissemination was a purpose. However, a total of 88% of the projects included some form of dissemination strategy indicating that dissemination was a valued activity among most projects. Many projects indicated that replication was a purpose. Often projects focusing on dissemination indicated that the ultimate goal was the replication of effective practices via increased awareness resulting from the project's dissemination efforts. Such projects were coded as having dissemination as a primary goal. Twenty-eight percent of the projects considered replication a guiding purpose; while 22% of the projects included some form of replication support. Research was the next most frequently indicated purpose at 36%. Only 4% of the projects listed adoption or development as a purpose and no projects cited training as a purpose.

Issue Delineation. Issue delineation was defined as the process by which EPI projects identified the needs and areas of concern relevant to the practices/programs to be identified. This phase of the EPI process is considered critical by experts as it focuses the project on those areas of greatest concern to practitioners. Unfortunately, it is a phase that is often done in a cursory fashion or avoided entirely. Involvement in this process may be related to a scholarly view of the project as all projects having research as a purpose indicated some form of issue identification. No other characteristic appears to have such a relationship.

Only 76% of the projects studied included any form of issue delineation. Of these projects, the most frequently used method was a review of literature (42%). Twenty percent of the projects gained insight into the issues through some form of direct contact with practitioners. Of these, the primary method was interviews (60%) with equal numbers contacting practitioners through site visits or at conferences (20% each). Approximately one-quarter of the projects had the issues defined to some extent by legislative initiative. Only half of these projects further clarified the issues.

Nomination Process. All projects had some method for soliciting site nominations. Overwhelmingly, projects relied on interviews or surveys, alone or in combination with other methods: 72% of the projects used interviews and 52% used surveys. Other methods used included utilization of programs receiving funding for development purposes (16%) and review of program descriptions in the literature or specialized directories (8%). Slightly more than one-third (36%) of the EPI projects depended on a single strategy for soliciting nominations. Of these 78% used surveys and the remaining 12% used interviews.

None of the projects using interviews in the nomination process used structured interviews. Eighty-six percent of all interviews were conducted by phone. Interviewees were practitioners (42%), experts (25%), and combinations of practitioners, experts, and consumers (33%). Most frequently, interviews were conducted to obtain both site names and additional information regarding programs (50%). Seventeen percent of the interviews sought either a site name alone or detailed information about the programs and practices at a site. An additional 16% of the interviews were conducted in stages with varying degrees of information required.

Projects using surveys show a somewhat different emphasis. No surveys attempted to solicit site names alone. The majority of projects sought both site names and limited additional information (62%). Twenty-three percent of those projects using surveys solicited detailed information and 15% sought mixed levels of information. Nominations were solicited from a group similar to that reported for interviews: 44% practitioners, 25% experts, and 31% mixed.

Selection Process. The selection process refers to the methods used to review nominated sites to determine whether they warrant inclusion in the EPI project. Two primary methods were identified: selection by evaluation (88%) and self-selection (16%). Self-selection involves the application of selection criteria by the site staff. The site staff make the determination that their program/practice warrants inclusion as an effective program/practice. More than one-third of the projects clearly identified a multi-staged selection process. The majority of these projects had a two-stage process (56%), with the remaining projects fairly equally split between three- and four-stage projects (23% and 24%, respectively). One project involved a multi-stage process incorporating both self-selection and selection by evaluation.

Selection by evaluation involves a process by which persons not associated with the sites make decisions regarding which practices/programs are considered effective. Primary factors in this process are who will make the decision and how. Of those projects involving selection by evaluation, 56% of the decision makers were representatives of the EPI project. Fifty-five percent of the time the EPI project representatives made the decision without any other group's involvement. Only 25% of the projects involved representation from multiple groups. The majority (69%) of the projects reporting the decision process (64%) involved some form of group decision making, either voting or consensus. The decisions were based on review of evaluation data (32%), review of program materials (36%), information obtained during site visits (36%), or through review of nomination data (45%). Projects reviewing nomination data had requested detailed information in the nomination process (40%) or some information (60%).

Selection Criteria. A set of criteria must be established to determine which practices/programs are to be considered effective. Even sites which self-select minimally must be notified of the type of programs desired by the agency conducting the EPI study. Consequently, all but one project reported the use of some form of criteria. The number of different criteria reported, in accordance with the coding categories, ranged from 0 to 12. The median number used was 6 and the mean was 4.3. Surprisingly, the number of criteria did not drop for those projects involving self-selection (mean = 6) nor did the number of criteria increase for those projects with multi-stage selection processes. The criteria most frequently identified were: addresses the problem

(54%); provides qualitative effectiveness data (42%); willingness to participate in the project (38%); and type of service, replicability, and number of years in progress (33%). These criteria are indicitive of an emphasis on issue and purpose related criteria; that is, the most commonly used criteria are concerned with the relation of the practice/program to the project purpose or to the relevant issues. Only one evaluative criteria is listed and this represents the field's emphasis on qualitative data.

Documentation Procedures. A variety of methods for obtaining information about practices/programs were identified. Sixty-percent of the projects included some form of site visit. All projects conducting site visits sent at least one member of the project staff. Thirty percent of these projects also included other persons (e.g., experts or practitioners). Team size ranged from 1 to 5 persons with 71% of the teams using more than one person. This practice follows recommendations made by experts who suggest that at least two persons should participate in the site visit to increase the accuracy of the information obtained.

Other methods of obtaining detailed information about a site included review of program materials (32%), descriptive information developed by the site--possibly in a funding application (24%), first-hand knowledge of a program either through previous exposure (e.g., state consultants or site visits during the selection process) or from involvement at the site (20%), or from a review of evaluation data (12%). Additionally, one-third of the projects returned their documentation of the practice/program to the site staff for review and confirmation of accuracy.

Dissemination Strategies. As mentioned previously 88% of the projects had some form of dissemination strategy. All of these projects completed some form of a document whether it be a project report, a listing of identified practices, or a conference-proceedings document. Forty-four percent completed only a document; whereas 22% of the projects used a document and one additional dissemination strategy, and 26% involved multiple dissemination strategies. Technical assistance and specialized conferences or education fairs were the next most frequently used strategies (26%). Thirteen percent of the projects reported some ongoing mechanism for updating the practices/programs. Finally, 20% of the projects provided grants to identified sites to facilitate the dissemination process.

Replication Support. Almost all projects functioned implicitly or explicitly on the belief that EPI would result in the adoption or adaption of effective practices/programs. However, only 24% of all projects included some form of replication support. The methods used to support replication were equally divided between the provision of technical assistance and funding adoption grants. Sixty-seven percent of the projects providing support provided both technical assistance and adoption grants. Surely this supports the conclusion that those projects which do recognize the importance of providing for replication place a substantial effort in this direction.

Demographic Information. Information on the demographic characteristics of the projects and the practices/programs they identified were collected to determine if these characteristics in any way affected the process. It was hypothesized that projects focusing on rural practices/programs might function under funding constraints which would influence the nomination and documentation procedures. Generally, no relationships were found between the type of practice/program or grade levels identified and the EPI process. Geographic factors were difficult to assess and only one project reported inclusion of both rural and urban practices. Likewise the perspective of the project, LEA, SEA, or national, had no apparent relationship to the process involved.

CONCLUSIONS

Although frequently used, EPI is a process that has previously lacked clarification and explication. Various phases of the process have not been isolated in the literature prior to this study. This survey of existing projects has delineated the major phases of the process and has provided supportive data on the frequency with which various procedures are used. In addition, a review of related literature and interviews with persons experienced in EPI has resulted in clarification of the difficulties and benefits related to the various phases. These phases are outlined in the process model depicted in the flowchart on pages 6 - 9 . Elaboration of these phases and prescriptive information regarding the application of these phases to EPI projects are discussed in the how-to-guide for practitioners.

Despite the advances made in delineating the methodology of EPI projects as a result of the present study, many problems remain. This study has not provided any information on the impact of the projects reviewed. Assuming that the ultimate aim of all projects is the implementation of improved practices in new sites, no data exist to determine what impact the EPI projects have had in reaching this objective. Certainly one is concerned with which type of EPI study most effectively influences practice. This type of evaluation would provide valuable information for future projects. Additionally, clear documentation of EPI projects would facilitate studies such as the one described. It is recommended that future EPI projects be considered a form of field-based research and that efforts be made to document the methodology utilized. Results of EPI projects should be investigated and the resulting impact data should be evaluated to determine the most effective method for influencing change. These recommendations call for a research orientation to the EPI process; however, this reconception of EPI projects as a form of research does not necessarily require that the focus on practitioners be altered. EPI projects offer a fertile opportunity for the union of both the research and practitioner perspectives.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Regional Resource Center West (RRC West) was a federally funded project providing technical assistance to the states of Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada from 1980 to 1983. An extensive library of documents

related to issues and practices in special education was maintained. The 12 RRCs serving the states were involved in a national search for effective practices during this three year period. Thus, a relatively complete set of materials were maintained on the topic.

2. A number of EPI projects involved identification of effective practices by multiple, distinct groups. These projects, however, often followed almost identical procedures. For example, the RRC project described above involved 12 separate centers. General procedures were the same for all centers. Therefore, the RRC projects were treated as a single EPI project for coding purposes. The number of RRC projects, thus, did not overly influence the study results. This practice of counting multi-group projects as single projects is what is meant by unduplicated.

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